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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

FEBRUARY, 1955

35¢

COSMIC SABOTEUR

By Frank M. Robinson



Introducing the

AUTHOR



Raymond E. Banks



OCTOBER 4, 1952. I sat down to write science fiction in earnest. Age 34, married, a war veteran, industrial account executive, BA in English from UCLA. Chief Desire: To be a writer. The Record: 9 years of unsuccessful off-and-on writing with some exceptions. I had been *ESQUIRE'S* Discovery of the Month back in '46, with a fantasy story. Had had a radio play on the NBC network—one. Had written a novel, taking three years, and it was a failure. Production: Dismal. Summary: What makes you think you can write?

OCTOBER 4, 1954. Stories written: 46. Stories sold: 16. Summary: Not bad, even for the oldest newcomer in this field, with the added responsibility of a baby son.

ANALYSIS: Low-level perseverance, education, hot desire to write, encouragement of friends and relatives, talent and imagination—not enough by far.

I had discovered I was a private soldier in the most insidious and devastating war fought within the framework of civilization. The enemy? TV and newspaper, magazines, books, scintillating conversation, the shine of the newly-washed auto, nagging errands of daily living, bullets like interesting phone calls, clubs, miniature golf, house repairs, the job, always the job, and myself. This was the Soft War, the diversions of our complex life which allow you to do a little of everything and not much of anything. In this molasses would-be

(Concluded on Page 69)

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The Editorial

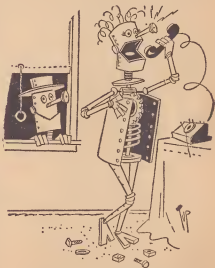
PUSH-BUTTON living—one of the prophecies of science fiction—is coming up fast now. We've already got some of the minor conveniences such as radio-controlled garage doors which open as your car approaches, not to mention the very common gadgetry including automatic washers, armchair radio-tv control, etc. The big step will be robot servants, et al. And with such development our life will not only be improved, but it may go haywire for awhile!

WE had the thought brought home recently during the national elections. We were standing in line waiting our turn to enter and operate the voting machine. We were amazed at the number of people who couldn't operate it, as simple as the procedure is. One confused voter, after being assisted by a kindly judge, stalked away muttering, "They ought to shoot the guy who invented that complicated machine!"

WE'VE been speculating ever since on how that individual will adapt to a real push-button world. Within this century we may have the first commercial robots on the market. This will revolutionize home living, doing away with all household chores from cooking to cleaning. A boon to be sure. And yet some people, like our confused voter, will be per-

plexed when faced with simple button controls and create domestic havoc. We'll bet there'll be many instances of crossed-instructions: dumping garbage on the living room rug, watering the flowers—on the wall paper, cleaning the dishes in the incinerator, and a myriad other combinations.

THE prospect is amusing and inevitable. It's given us the idea for an interesting cover. You will be seeing it next month. Watch for it! wh



"Hello, police . . . I want to report a peeping Tom!"



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They told him he hated Earth, beating him
until he nearly died — for he must be convinced!
... It was all part of his indoctrination as a —

Cosmic Saboteur

by

Frank M. Robinson

THEY jumped him when he was walking past an alley, a couple of blocks from the stockyards on Chicago's brawling South Side.

He had gotten off the "EI" two stops down because it was a damn fine Spring morning and he liked to walk through the Polish section

and watch the city wake up. He was 17 years old and he hadn't grown cynical with the world yet. He liked the clean, fresh smell of the early morning and he got a kick out of the sleepy-eyed housewives in their ratty bathrobes, banging open the front door to bring in the milk and the morning paper.





He'd pick up the live-stock reports, he thought, hop an "El" back uptown and maybe he'd be at Amalgamated News Service only a couple of minutes late. And if they didn't like it, they knew what they could do about it. His kid brother ran copy at the News and he said they could use another boy down there.

"Stan," Larry had said, *"you're wasting your time at AMS. You won't get as much dough at the News but you'll learn something."*

Which was something to consider because Larry was one bright cookie and someday he was really going to be somebody . . .

It was early morning and nobody had started to work yet—the streets were deserted. There was a chill in the air and he stopped by an open alley to light a weed and take the clamminess out of his lungs.

And then he got it.

A handful of knuckles right in the mouth, splintering his teeth and splitting his lip so he sprayed blood like somebody had squeezed a sponge. It was hard to get a good look because the shock had filled his eyes with tears. But there were three of them and they were grown men and the biggest he had seen outside of a television wrestling match.

He screamed *"Help!"* just once

before a hand as big as a typewriter buried itself wrist deep in his stomach. He doubled up and went limp, gasping for breath. One of the men caught him by the jacket collar and pulled him further into the alley, to the back of a restaurant where there was a small mountain of empty boxes and garbage cans full of orange peels and eggshells and stale doughnuts.

Nobody said a word.

He was still fighting for his breath and feeling sick when they stood him up against the refuse pile and started going over him scientifically, cutting his face and hitting him in the kidneys. He tried to blink away the blood that kept streaming into his eyes, to get a good look at them. But they kept working on his face until all the world was a bloody haze and it was hard to even make out light and shadow . . .

He lashed out once and heard a satisfying grunt and then somebody hit his wrists with a slat of wood, deadening the nerves so he couldn't close his hands. He tried to scream but he had no wind left and he realized dimly it wouldn't have done much good. The streets were deserted and it was the type of neighborhood where nobody went to anybody else's rescue—least of all, early in the morning.

A fist caught him flush on the side of the jaw and he staggered over against the garbage cans and fell to the bricks, his face half buried in the stinking garbage. He played dead dog for a moment, catching his breath, then scrambled to his knees, clawing handfuls of rotting orange peels and decayed bones to throw at the three silent men in front of him.

"You'll never get away with this! The cops . . ."

The toe of a shoe caught him in the groin and he collapsed again. He didn't even recognize the thin screaming that sounded in his ears as his own.

A voice from a million miles away said: *"We're not supposed to kill him!"* and he guessed that the men were from out of town because it was an accent that he had never heard before. Then two of them were holding him up, twisting his arms behind him, while the third stuffed garbage in his mouth, choking him so his screams died away to a dull, muffled sob.

They let him go for a minute and he tried to run away. They laughed and tripped him before he had taken three steps. Then they jerked him to his feet and started hitting him again, working him over professionally, chopping at him with fists covered by thin,

leather gloves that cut his face and ripped his shirt and jacket.

When he finally slipped limply to the pavement, they let him lay there, kicking him in the thighs and the buttocks. His cap was a dozen feet away, the remnants of his jacket not too far from that. His pants were ripped and his shirt was in shreds, the strips waving like bloody banners in the slight, morning breeze.

One of the three said *"I guess it's time to go."* Stan could hear running feet and then there was a long silence. He couldn't tell if it was a minute or half an hour later when footsteps again sounded across the bricks and somebody knelt by his side.

"You're hurt, son! Let me help you. . ."

The voice was soft and full of compassion, like a minister's might be. The man helped him to his feet and Stan lurched to the street and sat down on the curbstone. He tried to wipe away the blood with a tattered shirt sleeve but it still seemed to be running down his cheeks. Then he realized that he was crying.

"Try this."

He felt something pressed into his hands and wiped at his face with the handkerchief.

"T-thanks."

"Who were they, son?"

"I don't know. I was just walking past the alley and they . . . jumped me. I don't know why. Honest to God, Mister, I don't know why!"

He felt close to crying again and shut up for a moment to try and control the convulsive heaving of his chest. Then he looked up at the man standing next to him.

Black shoes, brand new. Neatly pressed gabardines. Tall and somewhat thin. Wearing a light, black topcoat like you might imagine a priest would wear. A tan hat, also brand new. Middle twenties, with the face of a saint. The face of a man you knew you could trust.

"What's your name, son?"

"Stan. Stanley Martin." He was still close to sobbing and the name came out with too many syllables.

The man pondered for a moment and Stan thought he looked a little like a high-school principal trying to guess how bright a student might be.

"We'll have to fix you up, Stan. Then we'll have to take you home." He helped Stan to his feet and guided him over to a black car a few yards down the street.

Far away, there was the wail of a siren.

"The cops," Stan said, hanging back. "I gotta tell the cops."

"There'll be time enough for that later," the man said smoothly.

There was the faintest suggestion of haste in his voice.

"I oughtta wait," Stan mumbled, but the man pushed him gently into the car and Stan didn't argue. He lay down on the back seat, resting his throbbing head against the cushions and the side of the car. It was a big car, he thought vaguely. Like a rich man's sedan, with a glass partition between the driver and the passengers.

He heard a hissing sound from somewhere and the world started to gray out. And then he suddenly wondered how he could be taken home if the man didn't know where he lived. . .

Just before he blacked out altogether, a voice said:

"I'm your friend, Stan. Say it to yourself and say it over and over. I'm your friend. I saved your life."

"You're my friend," Stan repeated dully, his mind slipping slowly into a pool of throbbing blackness. "You saved my life . . ."

The last thing he saw was a quick glimpse of the city streets, the slowly rotting houses, and the bright splashes of green in the front lawns and the cottonwood trees.

CHAPTER II

HIS muscles were aching and sore and he felt sick to his

stomach.

His eyes wouldn't focus at first and he stayed flat on his mattress and stared at the hazy outlines of the room. It was a funny kind of hospital. Nobody had bandaged his cuts—they were still caked with blood—and he still had on the same torn clothes that smelled of sweat and dirt.

Where had the man taken him?

He shook his head, trying to make out the details of the room, and his vision cleared a little.

The room didn't even come close to a hospital. It was more like a jail. There was the cot that he was sitting on and the washbasin and the flush bowl and the barred door at the entrance. Nothing else. No windows, no desk, no calendar, nothing. Just a small cell of gray, featureless metal.

He stood up, holding on to the cot for support, and touched the bars wonderingly. He hadn't done anything wrong, he thought. Not a damn thing!

"Guard! Guard!"

He'd get a lawyer! Larry had connections and maybe . . .

There were footsteps outside the cell door and a moment later it swung open. The man who opened it wasn't a guard—at least he didn't dress like one, Stan thought. Just a man in a blue suit. Smiling and urbane and what the ad writers

would call dapper.

Except for his eyes. The same kind of cold eyes that an executioner might have. Eyes that had watched people die—slowly.

Stan shivered.

Death. In a blue serge suit.

"I was wondering when you were going to wake up," the man said pleasantly. He held out his hand. "My name's Fred Tanner. You. . . ."

Stan didn't take the hand. "I want to know what's coming off here! Where's the joker who brought me here? Where's . . ."

"Somebody else can tell you all you want to know," the man said easily. "Just follow me."

Stan didn't move.

"You coming?"

It wasn't a question, it was a statement. Tanner stood there, his head half cocked, watching Stan curiously, like somebody might watch an ant or a bird. Stan started to say something but the words died in his throat. Tanner was no weakling. He had thick wrists and a bull neck and a feeling of power that he wore like a suit of clothes.

He was the type, Stan thought coldly, who could break you in two if he wanted.

He shrugged and followed Tanner down the corridor for a hundred feet and then into a room about the size of his own cell.

There was an oval shaped desk in one corner and a tubular chair by it, both of the same metal as the walls and the floor. The whole assembly looked like it had been punched out of one sheet.

The man behind the desk looked like an ex-football player ten years later, Stan thought. A husky man, just starting to go to fat, with thick lips and thinning hair.

Tanner pushed Stan forward. "Here's the boy, Mr. Malcolm."

Stan wet his lips. "I . . . I'd like to know what this is all about, sir."

"Fred," the man behind the desk said in a bored voice. "He lacks manners."

Tanner casually lashed out with the flat of his hand and caught Stan on the side of the head—hard. Stan staggered against the wall and half-slid to the floor. He could feel the tears start again.

"Hey! What's the . . ."

"Again, Fred."

Stan crumpled to the floor, shook his head, and struggled back to his feet. He was dazed but he knew enough not to say anything.

"What's your name?"

"Stanley Martin. I told . . ."

"Fred."

The blow rocked him but he managed to keep his feet. His legs felt like water.

"How many of your family are

living, Martin?"

"Just my mother." He licked his cracked lips. "And my brother. That's all."

"You've lived in Chicago all your life?"

"Yes . . . yes, sir."

MR. Malcolm finally put down the reports he had been reading and looked up at him. If Tanner's eyes had been cold, Stan thought, then Mr. Malcolm's eyes were frozen.

"You don't like Chicago, do you?"

"I . . . I guess I like it well enough."

"No, you don't," Mr. Malcolm said smoothly. "You told the other copy boys you hated the city and as soon as you could, you were going to leave it."

Stan gaped. "How did you know?"

"We know a lot of things." Mr. Malcolm leaned casually back in his chair, inspecting Stan like he would a butterfly on a pin. "We know that you hate your mother. And your brother."

"Where do you get that stuff?" Stan bleated, his voice rising.

"What are you trying to prove?"

"Fred. Again."

Tanner had to help Stan up.

"I'm going to be sick," Stan said faintly.

The man behind the desk ignored him. "Your mother used to take a strap to you when you came home late, Martin. She used to accuse you of stealing in the stores."

Lies, Stan thought. But he didn't dare talk back.

"Your brother, Larry. He was always your mother's favorite, wasn't he? She always did a lot of things for him that she never did for you, didn't she?"

"Larry never . . .!"

"Fred."

"*I'm sick,*" Stan whimpered. "*Honest to God, I'm sick!*"

"You hate the city," Mr. Malcolm repeated coldly. "You hate your family."

"I think you're crazy," Stan said weakly. "I want a lawyer."

Mr. Malcolm turned back to his reports.

"Take him to the other cell, Fred."

Back to a cell, Stan thought weakly, following Tanner out. Where at least he could lie down . . .

But the other cell was too small to lie down in. It measured two feet square and there was no room to lie down. Or even sit down. The most he could do was lean.

He touched the wall with his hand and screamed with pain. The walls were wired for electricity, a thin strip of insulation separating

them from the floor. He couldn't lie down, he thought. He didn't have room to sit down and he couldn't even lean against the walls. The only thing he could do was stand up . . . and stand still.

They took him out eight hours later, when he was too hoarse to scream and the electric walls had no effect on his sagging body.

IT was a different room, this time. A comfortable room with carpets on the floor and pictures on the wall and an over-stuffed sofa of some plastic material along one side.

The man waiting for him was the same young, saintly faced man who had picked him up on the street.

"This is Mr. Ainsworth," Tanner said in a low voice, and nudged him forward.

Mr. Ainsworth looked at him, shocked. "My God, son, haven't they taken care of your cuts?"

Stan just stared at him. Mr. Ainsworth's shocked look faded into one of grim efficiency.

"We'll have to do something about that, son—and right away!" He pressed a button and turned to Tanner. "Take this man to the infirmary immediately, Fred! And don't bring him back here until he's been bathed and issued new clothes!"

He looked back at Stan, his face a study in sympathy and pity. "Believe me, I had no idea . . ."

It was a reprieve from hell.

He was taken to an infirmary where doctors and nurses, their faces entirely hidden behind gauze masks, bathed him and washed his cuts and covered them with collodion and gave him a hypodermic shot of something that relaxed his muscles and banished his pain completely. They destroyed the rags he had on and in their place he was issued a suit of blue serge, like the one Tanner wore.

When he went back to the room with the carpets and the sofa, Mr. Ainsworth had set up a small dinner table. The room was thick with the fragrance of fried eggs and bacon and hot buttered toast and steaming coffee.

Stan's stomach knotted and turned and he suddenly was sick.

"Take it easy," Mr. Ainsworth said gently. "Go slow at first."

Stan pulled a chair over to the table. He felt weak. Eggs and bacon and coffee . . . After he had finished, he sat back and took the cigarette that Mr. Ainsworth offered him.

"What am I doing here, Mr. Ainsworth? Why can't I get a lawyer?"

"I wish I could answer all your questions," the saintly faced man

said thoughtfully. "But you have to understand that I'm just a hired hand here. There are some things I'm not at liberty to tell you."

"If I'm not in jail, then just where the hell am I?" Stan asked bitterly.

Mr. Ainsworth held up his hands. "I'm sorry, Stan."

Things weren't adding up, Stan thought, confused. Where was he if he wasn't in jail? The cell and the slightly curving corridor, all of metal. And the doctors and the nurses, their faces almost hidden behind their gauze masks . . .

"They took me to see a Mr. Malcolm the other day," Stan said in a low voice. "He told me I hated the city and that I even hated my own mother and brother. Can you beat that? Honest, this character . . ."

His voice trailed away. Mr. Ainsworth was staring at the floor, a frown on his face.

"Everybody builds up resentments against parents who are overly strict, Stan. And it's not unusual for a mother to favor one of her children over the others."

Stan stared at him, open-mouthed.

"But you're agreeing with Mr. Malcolm," he whispered. "Honest, you must be a little crazy, too."

Mr. Ainsworth looked hurt.

"I'm your friend, Stan—I

wouldn't lie to you! I didn't save your life just so I could tell you lies!"

It was crazy, Stan thought. He had been on his way to the stockyards one morning and the roof had fallen in. He had been kidnapped and tortured apparently for no other reason than to be told he hated his family.

It didn't make sense.

He dropped his cigarette on the carpet and ground it out under his heel. "You're just as bad as the others—you're working right in with them!"

Mr. Ainsworth looked disappointed and pressed a button on his desk. Tanner appeared in the doorway, his face as impersonal as ever.

"You'll have to take him back, Fred." He looked at Stan sadly. "We're trying to be your friends, son, and you won't let us. We're only telling you the truth!"

Stan started to shake. "You can go to hell," he blurted.

Tanner took him by the arm to lead him out and the very touch of his hand made Stan tremble even more. He was shaking like a leaf, and he couldn't stop it. It had been such an odd thing. When he had told Mr. Ainsworth he was as bad as the others, Mr. Ainsworth had . . . flickered.

THEY stripped him and put him in a room that felt like the inside of a packing-house refrigerator. His breath came in little wisps of fog and if he stood in one place too long, his feet started to freeze to the floor. He had to keep moving to keep warm and he realized he couldn't keep moving forever. It was cold and damp and at periodic intervals, it rained from pipes overhead. Water that quickly froze on the floor and made his hair a mass of frosted crystals and then started to freeze on him.

He only lasted four hours in the cold room. What they took him out, his nails were broken from clawing at the door frame and he had started to bleed at the fingertips.

Mr. Malcolm questioned him again.

Why wouldn't he admit that he hated his family? His mother was responsible for his father deserting the family. And his brother used to squeal on him when he was small and had even taken money that Stan used to leave on the dresser.

Stan made the mistake of laughing and ended up in a cell where he couldn't stand, where he had to remain stooped all the time. A small tray of slops appeared after each time he slept and once every sleeping period, somebody cleaned it

out.

Mr. Ainsworth questioned him next and it meant a bath and food and cigarettes and rest. He took them and enjoyed them.

Then he told Mr. Ainsworth what he thought of him. They threw him in a small, pitch-black cell and left him there. For weeks. Months.

He spent his time huddled in a corner, thinking of the city and his mother and Larry and what Spring looked like and how leaves that ended up in the Fall as large as your hand, started out as nothing more than a strip of green no bigger than his fingernail. A dozen times a period, he went over the last scene his eyes had glimpsed from Mr. Ainsworth's car. The drab houses and the green trees and the tiny stretch of blue beyond

...

And then there were the days when he didn't think of anything—though he was to wonder later if it had been days or weeks or even only hours. There was nothing by which to judge time, though he tried to keep track of his own pulse and counted the beats into minutes and the minutes into hours and the hours into days.

It was Mr. Ainsworth who rescued him.

"It's been a long time since I've seen you, son."

"You know where I've been."

"Don't hate me, Stan. I'm only trying to help you."

"I appreciate it," Stan said dryly.

And the odd thing was, he honestly *did* appreciate it. Ainsworth represented sleep and a bath and food and clean clothes. And he was grateful. Like any dog that had been kicked and starved and then wagged its tail when it was patted on the head.

And knowing all of this didn't change his reactions in the least.

"Stan," Mr. Ainsworth said quietly, "they want you to say that you hate your family. You say you don't. Perhaps you believe that. But would it hurt to merely *say* that you do? You don't have to actually believe it." He paused. "And to be perfectly truthful, I'm afraid that you might not live very much longer if you're not willing to go that far."

Stan jerked, as if somebody had jabbed him with a pin. To come so near to dying so many times had made life seem infinitely precious.

And what did it matter, actually? Some of the things they had been telling him—they weren't exactly lies.

"All right," he said dully. "So I hate the city. And I hate my folks."

Somewhere in his mind, a key-

stone crumbled.

"That's the way, son, Play it smart!" Mr. Ainsworth looked very proud of himself, as if Stan had just passed a difficult test.

"It's not supposed to stop there, is it?" Stan asked. "What am I supposed to believe in next, so you people won't kill me?"

"I don't think you're looking at it in the right light," Mr. Ainsworth said coldly, and Stan was panic-stricken for fear he would call in Fred and have him taken back to the cold room or the small-cell. "We're just telling you things about yourself that you didn't know before."

"Sure," Stan said quickly, trying to sound sincere. "You're just telling me things I never would have suspected."

He got better treatment after that. They assigned him to a cell where he could lie down and sleep and when they talked to him, they offered him cigarettes and joked with him. Even Mr. Malcolm went out of his way to be pleasant. They were uncannily accurate when they told him about his past life and he got to thinking more and more that there was something in what they said.

His mother had been no prize and his brother was a lying, little sneak.

Almost a year went by before

they led him up to the big one.

When they told him, point blank, that he hated humanity.

STAN felt like somebody had knocked the wind out of him.

"You can't be serious!"

Mr. Ainsworth sighed and shook his head. "Stan, do you remember when I first picked you up? Three of your fellow human beings had dragged you into an alley and were beating you up—you would have been killed if I hadn't come along." He shrugged. "That's the human race for you, son!"

"But they were only three individuals!" Stan objected.

"And the others are so much different?" Mr. Ainsworth sneered. "Nobody cared about you, Stan—not even your own family. No human being cares for anybody else but himself! There's a war every generation where they slaughter each other by the millions. And sickness. Have they ever made any really concerted drive against it? Have they ever really tried to stamp out poverty?"

His lip curled. "They're apes! Nothing but apes!"

"You talk like you're not human!" Stan said, and then realized that he had made a mistake.

Mr. Ainsworth started to flicker again, like film in a projector that's run down. Stan gripped the sides

of his chair and froze, trying desperately not to show his fear.

Mr. Ainsworth was watching him closely. "I think we should tell you what this is all about, Stan. Watch."

He pressed a button on his desk and the wall behind him started to glow, then drifted away like cigarette smoke. Stan closed his eyes, feeling dizzy and sick and horribly afraid that he was going to fall. He opened them again, slowly.

The end of the room opened out on a harsh, black sky dusted with the tiny pin points of stars. Stars that didn't twinkle but shone with a bright, steady blaze. To his left and below he could see a huge segment of a mottled green and blue globe, laced over with shifting shreds of white.

He was almost sick again and then the grandeur of the scene struck him and he caught his breath, sharply.

He was somewhere in space, suspended thousands of miles above his home planet and seeing the universe as man had never seen it before. The blazing infinity of stars and the slowly rolling, green globe that was the Earth . . .

"The home of the apes," Mr. Ainsworth mused. He paused. "We can use that planet to far better advantage than the human race. We intend to take it. And you're

going to help us."

Stan looked at Mr. Ainsworth coldly.

"What's in it for me?"

CHAPTER IV

"HALF the world," Mr. Ainsworth said slowly. "One half of your whole, wide world!"

Stan stared at him coldly for a full minute, then started to laugh—laughter than ripped out of him like waves and washed against the sides of the room.

Sick laughter, because he knew the price he was going to have to pay for it.

He sobered. There was a time, he thought, when every human being had to stand up and be counted as a brave man or a coward. This was his.

"And you thought I would take it! You thought I would sell out the whole human race!" His face was seamed with hate and he thumped his chest proudly, suddenly not caring what happened to himself. His voice was hoarse. "I'm one of the apes, remember? They're *my* people and it's *my* planet . . ."

Mr. Ainsworth's face looked like it was carved from a block of ice.

"Look at me, Martin! *Look at me!*"

Stan looked and felt the sweat

pop out on his forehead and his stomach knot into a small, hard ball.

Mr. Ainsworth was fading, the frames slipping past so slow Stan could count them. And the image that was building up in Mr. Ainsworth's place . . .

Stan screamed and staggered back against the bulkhead, his arm raised before his eyes.

"You're going to help us," the creature said in a horribly liquid voice. "You're going to help us because you want to. We need advance men to soften this planet up. You're going to be one of them. And after you've done your work, our fleet will arrive!"

It paused dryly.

"But I see you've still got some indoctrination to go through!"

They took him back to one of the cells and starved him and let him live in his own filth until he wasn't sure if he was a human being or some sort of animal. They made him horribly afraid of pain until he screamed in agony when they merely laid the knives on the table. And with pain as a wedge, they took his personality apart piece by piece and flayed it and tortured it until it no longer resembled the personality that had once been Stanley Martin.

He was cut off from all contact with human beings—or creatures

who had masqueraded as human. Tanner had disappeared and Mr. Ainsworth and Mr. Malcolm no longer bothered to appear as homo sapiens. They saw him every waking day and if their interviews had been harsh before, now they were brutal beyond belief.

He believed what they said and he thought what they wanted him to think.

Not to have done so would have meant death.

But there was still . . . resistance. The personality that had been Stanley Martin wasn't entirely gone. There were still shattered fragments of memories and wishes and desires that hadn't been entirely obliterated. Tiny fragments that made him unreliable.

ON the last day, he was strapped into a machine with clamps that fastened tightly to his head and chest.

The lights dimmed and he was alone in the darkness.

"What is your name?"

The tiny fragments of personality struggled and thought and then collapsed in bewilderment.

"I . . . I'm not sure."

The voices from nowhere continued.

"You have a family. You hate that family."

A faint, drifting haze of mem-

ories. Of a woman who had cooked his meals and tucked him into bed at night when he was very young. Of somebody named Larry who had once baled him out of a street fight by making like Bob Feller with some good-sized rocks. . . .

But what was bed?

What was street-fights?

What was Bob Feller?

"I . . . guess so."

The room exploded in blinding light that seared his eyes and lanced his brain.

"Are you sure?"

"Oh yes! Oh God, yes!"

The agony was over and once again the room was mercifully black.

"You hate the cities."

The cities.

The decaying houses and the rotting tenements. The stinking alleys and the littered parks and the filthy buildings.

And the lawns and the happy kids and the beaches. . . .

He didn't answer.

Somewhere within his mind a wheel started to spin. Slow. Then faster and faster until he was sweating and shaking with nausea and then it felt like he was flying apart into small fragments that tore and buffeted each other and pained. . . .

Of course he hated the cities

For a moment, peace.

"The apes. You hate the apes. You hate the human race."

The human race. *His* race. The pieces that were Stanley Martin started to flow together, to coalesce once more into a single individual. . . .

And then his nerve endings and ganglions felt sharp, searing pain. Pain that threaded along his nerves and burned into every segment of his body, pain that threatened to fry his cortical centers.

Pain that scattered the particles of personality that were Stanley Martin and shriveled them to nothingness. Pain that obliterated the last traces of conscience and memory.

"You hate the human race," a voice repeated smoothly.

"Yes," Stan said, not hesitating. "I hate the human race." And then he started to sweat and shake with an unreasoning anger that flooded him as suddenly as if somebody had turned on a hose. The pain. . . The pain for which the apes were responsible.

"I hate the apes! I hate their goddamned guts!"

A silent wave of exultation swept the compartment. They had fashioned the mold and had made their monster. . . .

Five minutes later, the space ship departed for its home system

"I hate the human race." And

CHAPTER V

HE was 24 years old. A tall, unsmiling, handsome man dressed in a blue serge suit and a hat that he liked to pull down over his eyes so he could look at the world as if it were in a frame. He wasn't the type who made friends and there was a subtle air of menace about him that frightened the people with whom he came in contact. He was a stranger who looked at the world with cold and calculating eyes, like a scientist might look at a piece of lab apparatus. Women were intrigued by him, made their approaches, and and hastily left—a little insulted and far more frightened.

Apes.

He was no longer 17, he was no longer a boy, and he wouldn't have shed a tear if he had been stretched on the rack. A hardness and a sense of power showed in the lines of his face and the set of his shoulders. People who talked to him felt inferior, as if they had been talking to a superman. And to a large degree they were absolutely right.

A small Thuscan flyer set him down one night on a fog-bound, Scotch moor, not far from Paisley. The next afternoon he had rented an apartment in Bristol and installed the first load of equipment.

For the next three months, he did nothing but observe and travel — and buy up some small parcels of property in fifty different cities spread far and wide over the globe.

He started to set up an organization, though he had difficulty finding men to staff it. Most of those who would have qualified had been executed or were behind bars for life. But by the end of six months, his organization was almost complete. Reynolds, Langerman, and Caldwell were his lieutenants—the men who got their hands dirty and directed those in the next echelon down.

His right hand man was sent to him by Thusca. A powerful, urbane-looking man who smiled often with his mouth but never with his eyes. A guard let him in and he stood quietly in the rear of the room while Stan continued with his briefing session.

There were a dozen new men at the meeting, listening intently to what he had to say.

They were the type whose loyalty was to money, Stan thought, amused. Hard-faced men who had probably fought for a dozen different causes and switched sides as easily as changing a shirt.

Stan had almost finished with the briefing.

"Essentially, it's a simple smuggling operation. Only you're not

to know what you're smuggling and under no condition are you to open your packages."

A man up front suddenly interrupted. "Why not?"

Stan smiled bleakly. "The packages are triggered, Piazza, I'm very much afraid if you tried to open it your head would be blown off. Satisfied?"

He turned back to the others. "We pay very well — very well, indeed. A smart man, who isn't too curious, will find it well worth his while. We'll give you the packages and tell you where to leave them. In some cases, it will involve extensive travel on your part. Be cautious, be careful, and be quick on the trigger in case anybody tries to take them away from you."

THE man whom Stan had called Piazza stood up and started for the door. Stan watched him quietly until his hand was on the knob.

"What's the matter, Piazza?"

The man turned and spat on the carpet. "I don't like your proposition. I think it stinks. We take all the risks and we don't even know what we're doing!"

Stan shook his head sadly. "I'm sorry, Piazza. Really sorry. I had hoped we could use you."

Piazza whitened. "I'm no stoolie, Mr. Martin."

"We can't take the risk," Stan said simply.

In a movement that only one pair of eyes could follow, he reached inside his coat and shot through the cloth of the lapel.

Piazza looked faintly surprised and slumped limply to the floor.

Stan smiled coldly at the others.

"I assume the rest of you can be counted on?"

After the others had left, the man in back walked up and introduced himself, flashing the small, fluorescent identity card that labeled him as having come from Thusca.

"Tanner." Stan frowned. "Funny, I think I've heard the name before but I can't place it."

"I met you briefly on Thusca," Tanner said easily.

Stan shook his head. "No, it's before then." He paused. "But that's impossible!"

Tanner raised his eyebrows. "Why?"

Stan looked surprised. "Didn't they tell you? Just before I started on this mission, I lost my memory. Crack on the head or something. I only saw two people before I left and they were busy filling me on what I was supposed to do here. Didn't have time to see the doctors." He walked to the liquor cabinet and started mixing himself a drink. "I'll be seeing Mr. Ains-

worth and Mr. Malcolm in a few months and maybe they can help me then."

"You don't think your memory is liable to come back . . . here, do you?" Tanner asked curiously.

Stan laughed. "Not a chance—there's nothing that's apt to be familiar on *this* planet!" He dropped in the ice-cubes. "Still, it's awkward. For all I remember of my past life, I might as well have been born in a vat."

Tanner smiled faintly. "I didn't know you were in the smuggling business."

"It's a good front and one in which we won't get our own fingers dirty. Besides, you haven't asked me what we were smuggling."

Tanner swirled his drink so the ice cubes clinked against the side.

"Alright, what are we smuggling?"

"Sometimes packages, sometimes suitcases, sometimes hat-boxes. Our men take receipt of the packages and deliver them to different destinations where they think they're going to be picked up. Perhaps a broom closet in a building, perhaps a trash box on a city street, maybe a locker in a train station. There's only two things I haven't told the men—what's in the boxes, and the fact that they're never going to be picked up."

"What happens then?"

Stan sat down in a leather upholstered chair and threw a leg over the arm. "Nothing. Not until November 4th, that is. At twelve noon, London time, half the cities of this world will be blown off the globe."

Tanner looked puzzled. "So? The air forces the fleets, and the armies will still be intact."

"They'll be much too busy to fight us," Stan said smoothly. "You see, Tanner, they'll be fighting each other."

Which actually were very clever, Stan thought slowly. The divide and conquer theory. Each of the packages contained a Tuscan fusion weapon. Once they were set off, each country would think that another had sprung a sneak attack.

November 4th, Tanner and he would strike. November 5th, the world would be in chaos.

November 6th, the Tuscan fleet would land.

Tanner walked to the middle of the room and stood over the body of Piazza. "What are you going to do with our friend?"

"Send him away—I think to Africa." Stan picked the body up and lugged it into what had once been the bedroom. Now it was a room jammed with transmitting equipment and, against the far wall, a single hoop of shining metal standing upright on a black marble

base. The hoop was large, over six feet in diameter, with a thin, metal filament winding around it.

HE turned a dial set in the base. The filament glowed red and then a brilliant white. The hoop itself shimmered and faded, while at the same time a whirling circle of brilliant black built up where it had been. He tensed his muscles and heaved and Piazza's body hit the circle and disappeared, like a man plunging into quicksand.

"Where will he land?"

"In a doorway on the Street of Lepers in Casablanca." Stan turned the dial again and the whirling circle slowed and became translucent and then faded out altogether as the hoop sprang back into view.

Tanner gestured to the other equipment. "What's all this for?"

"Transmitting equipment to set off the fusion packages." Stan pointed to two boxlike structures against the far wall. One held a bank of fifty small, white lights. The other, a bank of fifty red. "The white lights are the operators themselves—I can tell immediately if anything happens to them. The others represent the fusion packages. If one of them goes, I know the package has been tampered with."

Even as he watched, one of the white lights flickered and died.

Tanner looked surprised. "What happened?"

"We just lost an agent," Stan said grimly. "Chicago sector." He glanced over at the bank of red lights—they were still lit. "It couldn't have been about the fusion packages. It must have been about the . . . other operation." He looked at Tanner. "The one you were sent to handle."

"What are you going to do about it?"

Stan shrugged. "We'll handle it ourselves, and then recruit another agent." He leafed through a filing cabinet, then finally pulled a dossier and gave it to Tanner. "Trace this man and find out what you can. We'll meet there in a week."

Tanner tapped the card lightly against his knuckles. "Mr. Ainsworth didn't think you'd be meeting any opposition."

Stan blanked his face of expression. He wasn't exactly sure why, but he didn't like Tanner.

"I didn't expect to."

There was a short silence and then Tanner walked to the hoop and worked the dial. The shimmering black sprang up and he stepped up on the marble. Just before he went through, he said: "What are you going to do about the . . . opposition?"

"When we find them, we'll smash them," Stan said coldly.

After Tanner had gone through, Stan shut off the hoop. As the circle faded it caught his image and held it briefly, like a mirror.

He stared at it abstractly.

The problem of possible opposition bothered him but there was something that worried him even more. Something he caught himself thinking about when he woke up in the morning. Something he thought about all day and something he couldn't get out of his mind when he went to bed at night.

Who was he?

CHAPTER VI

IT was a summer evening and downtown Chicago was a hot-box of sweltering buildings and steaming tar streets. People stretched out on the lawns in front of Buckingham fountain for any stray breezes that might wander in off the lake or else they curled up in front of fans and read until the small hours of the morning when the temperature had drifted down a few degrees so it was possible to go to bed without drowning in a pool of their own sweat.

A woman walking by the Pure Oil building suddenly saw a shimmering in the air and then a man was standing in the shadowed doorway, staring nonchalantly at her. She almost screamed; then put it

down to the heat and hurried by.

Stan strolled up Michigan Boulevard to stop for a moment in front of a bookstore where a man had been staring in the window.

"All set, Fred?"

Tanner nodded. "He leaves the Prudential building in half an hour. He parks his car on the ramp below the street, in the parking lot that runs parallel to the river. It's in the far corner—a sport model." He fumbled in his pocket for a small card. "Here's the license number. The ape is easy enough to recognize. About sixty years old, sport coat, and a pork-pie hat. He's had a small office here for a couple of weeks, doing government work, so he might be carrying a briefcase. Tomorrow he goes back east."

Stan memorized the description. "Just how good is he?"

"The best they've got. Losing him will be quite a blow to the apes. Quite a blow."

Stan stood in the shadows of the bookstore for a few minutes more. He could hear every tiny noise on the street, including the rapid tick-tick-tick of his own wrist-watch.

"I better go down. Be ready to help with the body five minutes after the hour."

He turned and started up the street, to the stairs that would take him to the level below. Hundreds of cars were parked in neat, silent

rows below the ramp. Overhead was the cold brilliance of hundreds of fluorescent lamps.

Light enough he thought. It wouldn't be . . . sporting . . . to shoot the ape scientist down in the dark.

He found the bright, two-toned sports car at the end of the ramp. Nobody was in sight. He smiled to himself and walked on past the car and then stood quietly in the shadows of a concrete pillar. He had a while to wait and disquieting thoughts swam slowly to the surface of his mind.

This city of Chicago. He had been to many cities on the planet but this was the only one that somehow . . . bothered him. A city that seemed oddly, tantalizingly familiar. And there was a pressing urgency for him to see some people in it . . .

But as an agent of Thusca, he could afford no time for such neurotic thoughts. He would tell the doctors about it when he returned, but right now there was work.

He stood there without moving a muscle, thinking of nothing at all, as if Stanley Martin were only an illusion and didn't really exist. It was a quarter to six.

Ten minutes to six.

Six o'clock.

And footsteps thudding on the concrete stairs a block away.

The man in the pork-pie hat was

coming to get his car.

STAN set the stud on his heat gun and waited.

An ape.

The man came closer and fumbled at the door of his automobile, trying to get the key into the lock.

Stan pressed the stud and the violet beam flashed out and splashed on the car door six inches from the man's hand. The paint flared into a smoking fire and a neat, thin line raced down the metal, cutting cleanly through the body and the upholstery and the steel frame.

He'd let him squirm for a second, Stan thought coldly, and then move the beam back and cut the ape in two.

Now!

He never touched the man. There was a spanging sound and the pillar Stan was leaning against suddenly showed concrete chips. He fell backwards and sprawled on the pavement, the violet beam from his heat gun crazily scorching the concrete overhead.

Somebody yelled to the man crouched by the car . . .

"Run! Run, you fool!"

The man in the pork pie hat dodged up the ramp. Stan tried to pick him off but the pillar showered concrete again and his aim was spoiled. Then the man was gone and Stan's mind turned to his own

problems.

The opposition had finally put in an appearance

"Come out now and you can come out alive. Fight, and we'll bring you out dead!"

A woman's voice, he thought coldly. Coming from a car about a hundred feet down . . .

He aimed his heater and exploded the gas tank, the flames whooshing out into the closed space.

"You didn't think we were actually there, did you?"

He fired again and then a steady shower of concrete chips that sprayed his elbow made him glance at the pillar, alarmed. It had been cut entirely away at the top and now it was being chewed away at the bottom, ready to topple over on him.

He set his heater for a fan-shaped ray to cover his movements and scrambled out from behind the pillar, desperately trying to dodge over to the line of cars.

Something spanged into his shoulder and spun him around. He fell heavily to the pavement, the pain briefly paralyzing his nerves. He waited a split second for the pain to lessen, then tried to scramble for his heater. The cement in front of him exploded into dust and chips that cut his face and almost blinded his eyes.

"Get up!"

SHE stepped out from behind another pillar. A tall, black-haired woman with wide cheekbones and cold, green eyes. Her face was hard and she carried her hand weapon with all the assurance of one who was thoroughly familiar with it. Two men came with her. They were capable looking men but not the grim, hard-eyed professionals that Stan was used to working with.

The woman walked over to Stan and slapped his face—hard—her nails digging bloody furrows in his skin.

"How does it feel to be a traitor? How does it feel to sell out your native planet for nothing at all?"

He didn't know what she was talking about and his face showed it.

"It was a clever scheme," she continued bitterly. *"To win a planet, you first cut off its head—you eliminate the scientists!"* She leveled her hand weapon at him. *"But that's not all you've had in mind. What other schemes has the renegade earthman thought of?"*

The world slipped into a haze of red and his hand darted for the pocket where he kept his heat gun—to pause, uncertainly, when he remembered it lay on the concrete fifteen feet away.

"I'm no ape!"

She laughed. *"They've made you*

into a Pavlovian dog that drools whenever they ring a bell—and you don't even realize what they've done to you! They pull the strings and their marionette jerks and dances and does their dirty work for them!"

Stan stared at her coldly. "What are you going to do?"

"Kill you. Now."

She raised the weapon and Stan knew she was perfectly capable of doing it. A moment more and the small pellets would burrow into his body, to explode deep in the flesh. He tensed himself for a final effort to escape, knowing it would be next to useless.

"You poor fool," she said slowly. "You'll be better off dead."

Her finger tightened on the trigger.

She never pulled it. There was a scream behind her and one of her men collapsed to the pavement, a thin swirl of smoke drifting up from his blasted chest. The girl's eyes narrowed, then she suddenly darted towards the river that lapped against the parking level. The remaining man dropped to his knees to cover her escape and the ramp was filled with the spanging sound of his own pistol.

The sound ceased abruptly in another burst of flames and smoke and then Tanner was racing down the ramp.

"Don't let her get away!"

Stan ran to the river's edge and Tanner cut the oily surface with lancing rays from his heater.

"She's gone," Stan said in a tired voice. "Save it." He watched the surface for a moment more, then turned back to Tanner. "Who was she? What's her name?"

Tanner shrugged. "I don't know who she is or what she's doing here. I can't tell you."

He wouldn't forget her, Stan thought slowly. That long, black hair and those green eyes. And she had moved like a cat, a sleek cat who was just as willing to kill for a cause as he was.

Tanner was studying his face. "Don't get any ideas about her—she's an ape."

Stan looked at him coldly. "The only idea I have is to kill her before she kills me."

He started walking towards another flight of stairs a block down. How long had it been since he had walked down the ramp? he wondered. There had been the noise and the oily smoke from the automobile. The ramp should have been swarming with curious apes by now. But for some reason it wasn't . . .

It had shaken him, he thought slowly. His briefing on Thusca had mentioned nothing about an opposition organization of the apes. And in particular, it had mention-

ed nothing about a . . . girl.

He would have to warn the agents in his own organization, he thought abstractly. And it would probably be best to use a code name. He asked Tanner for a suggestion.

"Use a girl's name," Tanner mused. "Say . . . Avis."

Stan looked at him sharply and had the odd feeling that was really the girl's name. And then he recalled Tanner racing down the ramp screaming "*Don't let her get away!*" and the disappointed look on his face when she had.

Tanner, Stan decided suddenly, had lied about not knowing her.

"She'll probably be around again," Tanner mused out loud. "And soon."

The second agent disappeared in Paris, two weeks later.

CHAPTER VII

IT was eight o'clock Thursday evening when Stan stepped out of a faintly glowing circle of black light in a small alley off the Rue Pigalle in Paris. He calmly lit a cigarette and walked down the street to a small cafe.

It was bigger on the inside than it looked from the street. A long, low-ceilinged room with a tiny platform and a small band, almost hidden by the cigarette smoke, at

the far end. Tahner and Reynolds, one of Stan's lieutenants, were seated at a small table along the side, earnestly talking to a frightened little man with an old-fashioned walrus moustache.

Stan squeezed in next to the little man and introduced himself. He ordered wine, then said: "You know the arrangements?"

The little man looked stubborn. "I'm not sure I like it."

"We're not asking much—and we'll pay well."

The little man made a show of licking his lips and nervously twisting his moustache.

"I don't get you, guv'nor. You want to give me a hundred thousand francs just to deliver a package to the souvenir stand at the top of the Eiffel Tower?"

"You're to give the girl a hundred francs," Stan cut in smoothly. "And ask her if she'll hold it for a Monsieur Lorenz."

The little man's eyelids drooped suggestively. "You're up to no good and a hundred thousand francs doesn't seem to me to cover it."

Stan moved in closer, threateningly. The little man thrust out his chin and glared at him.

"Just you watch your step, guv'nor! All I 'ave to do is 'oller 'elp and fifty people will be on your neck. And what's to keep me from talking about this anyways?"

"I could kill you right while you sit there," Stan said quietly. "I could do it and you wouldn't make a sound and nobody would know you were dead until ten minutes after we left."

The little man's eyes showed white and he nervously twisted a heavy ring on his finger. "You wouldn't dare, guv'nor. A bloke like you wouldn't dare!"

"You'll do exactly as we say," Stan interrupted coldly. "And if we wanted you to, you'd do it for exactly nothing." He smiled grimly. "Your real name is William Clark. You're in this country without a visa or a passport. You jumped ship from a British freighter during the war. Your wife died shortly after you signed up for your last voyage and there was some talk about it. But you disappeared and they never found you again or heard from you and the case was dropped."

He paused. "Do you want me to go on?"

THE little man's eyes were wide and beads of sweat were dripping off the ends of his moustache.

"Why now, you wouldn't turn in an old man, would you, guv'nor? I've been clean ever since I been over 'ere! I 'aven't done a thing!"

Stan stared at him coldly. "Will you or won't you? You know the

woman who runs the stand. It shouldn't be difficult."

The little man pretended to think about it for a moment.

"Why now, it doesn't seem like much," he mumbled. "Just a suitcase and you say all you want me to do is leave it with the woman?"

He had him, Stan thought.

"Be careful how you handle the suitcase and under no circumstances drop it—you'd be damned sorry if you did."

The little man drained his glass of wine. "When do I get my quid?"

"When we deliver the suitcase. Tomorrow."

The little man shivered and stood up.

"All right, I'll do it." He sidled past Tanner and stopped at the edge of the table. "Your eyes, guv'nor," he said suddenly, looking at Stan. "I swear to the Almighty, they're 'angman's eyes!"

Hangman's eyes.

Somewhere, someplace, Stan mused, he had thought that about somebody else. About Fred Tanner.

But he couldn't remember where it had been, or when.

Tanner fumbled in his wallet and gave the heavy man sitting next to him, a bill. "Reynolds, order up some more wine and see if they have any sandwiches, will you?" After Reynolds had left, he turned to Stan. "How many will

this make?"

Stan ticked them off on his fingers.

"One in Chicago's Palmolive building, one in the Woolworth building on Manhattan Island, one in a dressing room of the Old Howard in Boston. Glasgow, Tokyo, Moscow, London, Rome and 41 others. And now Paris. They're all covered. Fifty ape cities—none of them long for this world."

Tanner nodded thoughtfully. "Mr. Ainsworth will be very pleased. Very pleased indeed."

Reynolds was back with a wine bottle in a small wicker basket and a plate of tired looking sandwiches. Stan drank the wine and ate the sandwiches without actually tasting them at all.

The cities were dirty, filthy ghettos of brick and stone and the people were only apes, he mused. But somehow . . .

WILLIAM Clark lived in a small, stuccoed rooming house in a suburb midway between Paris and Versailles. It looked old even for a rooming house in France, Stan thought. There was a mustiness and an age you could sense even from the outside. The ivy that climbed the walls was dead, the stucco was chipped in spots, and the curtains he could see through the windows looked

yellowed and limp.

He climbed the front steps and worked the heavy knocker, then stood back waiting for the concierge to show up.

She didn't.

He tried the knocker again and then the door knob. There was a sudden snapping sound, the door creaked open, and he stepped in.

Dust—billows of it—rose from the hall rug. Dust that almost choked him before it settled once more on an ancient window seat and clung to the moldering drapes.

He turned to Tanner and felt a shock of surprise. Tanner was cradling his heat gun in his hands, ready for instant action. His face was grim.

"What kind of a man would you say Clark was, Martin?"

"Offhand, kind of a tidy little man and. . ."

"Not the type who would be living in an ancient rooming house?"

"That's right—he wasn't the type."

"Where did Clark say he lived?"

"Second floor—end of the hall."

"Let's go!"

Stan hesitated a moment. He was supposed to be in charge of the operation, yet Tanner was taking over. For a very good reason—Tanner knew something that he didn't. He followed Tanner up the

stairs, his feet sending out little puffs of dust from the stair treads. Clark's room was closed and he knocked lightly on the door.

There was no answer.

He tried the knob.

Locked.

"Reynolds—break it down."

The big man hunched his shoulders and drove for the door. The panel burst like it had been made from paper and he stumbled to the center of the room before he could stop himself.

"That was a foolish thing to have him do, Martin."

"Why?"

"You didn't know what to expect—it could have been a trap."

Stan's voice chilled. "You've been acting like a cat on a hot griddle ever since we walked in. Just what were you expecting?"

Tanner didn't answer. He sauntered into the room. "Well, where's Clark?"

That was a good question, Stan thought. Just where was Clark? He glanced around the room. The average rooming house cell, the kind so many people on this planet seemed to live in. A bureau and an unmade bed, the blankets rumpiled and twisted. . .

THERE was a linen runner on top of the bureau and on top of that was a glass, neatly wrap-

ped in cellophane. He walked over and barely touched it, intent on moving the glass to get a better look at a photograph behind it.

The cellophane cracked and crumbled at his touch.

The photograph behind it wasn't important, Stan thought. A photo of a ship on which Clark had been a crew member.

What was important was the cellophane that had crumbled at his touch and the dusty linen runner which hung in tattered shreds where it overlapped the top of the bureau.

As if the weight of the cloth had become too much for the strength of the linen thread.

Old.

Incredibly old.

Tanner was standing by the window, looking out. When he moved back, his arm touched the curtain. The curtain collapsed and powdered, sifting down to the dusty carpet.

Stan watched it with intense curiosity, then moved over to the bed. The bed clothes were rumpiled but they weren't lying flat. They were bunched in spots — as if somebody might still be underneath them.

He held his heat gun in one hand and flicked the blankets aside with the other. Like the curtains, they ripped and powdered.

Beneath the blankets was a skeleton — a few tattered pieces of cloth lying inside the gaunt bones. "I see you've found Clark," Tanner said.

"Clark?"

Stan could feel the sweat pop out on his forehead. Nobody on Thusca had ever told him that a man could die and the flesh on his bones shrivel to dust all in one evening. He bent over the bed. The skeleton was that of a man, a very old man, whose bones had started to calcify at the joints. There was nothing about it to link it with William Clark.

The little man with the walrus moustache had been middle-aged. He hadn't been old, he certainly hadn't been senile to the point where his joints were hardening.

Then he saw the ring on one of the finger bones. He touched it gingerly and rubbed away the green verdigris. The same ring he had seen Clark toy with at the tavern.

But the age! The incredible age!

He turned to Tanner, questioning. The narrow-eyed, dapperly dressed man was standing at one side of the window, his heat gun cocked. He was staring steadily through the glass and didn't bother to turn around. His voice was hard.

"You want to know what it's all about, don't you, Martin? Well,

come on over and take a look for yourself."

"What about me?" a frightened voice suddenly rattled. "When's somebody going to tell me what's going on?"

Reynolds. They had forgotten all about him, Stan thought. Now the big man was shaking with fear, fear of the unknown. Stan wrinkled his nose. The ape was sweating and you could smell him clear across the room.

Tanner laughed easily. "I'll give *you* a full explanation later on, Reynolds. But right now we're in trouble!"

CHAPTER VIII

STAN ran to the other window and stared at the street below. It didn't seem any different than when he had come in a few minutes later. The wide boulevard of stucco houses, the shade trees and the lawns. And a few of the apes on the sidewalk, hurrying to work. . . .

Only they weren't hurrying, he noticed after a moment. One man was halfway down the house steps across the street, a brief case under his arm. But he wasn't moving. He was frozen in mid-air, off-balance, one foot halfway down to the next step. A housewife had stopped in mid-stride two doors

down, her shopping bag swung forward at an awkward angle. At the corner, a small Renault car was poised in the middle of the street, caught in the process of turning.

Further down the block, two small boys in short pants and berets had been playing catch. One was crouched, his hand out. The other was standing, one foot in the air and one upraised arm behind his head. Stan narrowed his eyes and located the ball. It was about ten feet from the thrower, crawling slowly through the air.

Even as he watched, the ball slowed and stopped, hovering twenty feet above the asphalt.

"The air!" Reynolds suddenly screamed. "It's getting hard to breathe!"

"It'll get harder!" Tanner said grimly. "This will last for about half an hour. Slow your breathing and whatever you do, move slow. You move too fast and the air friction alone will set your clothes on fire!"

He swung slowly forward and brought the butt of his heat gun against the glass. Small cracks lanced through the window but it didn't break. Tanner pushed against it and the pieces slowly folded outwards.

"We're in the fast field, Martin—and so are they."

"They?"

"Avis and her men. The ones who caught you flat-footed under the ramp the other day. They're the ones who put up the field, who killed Clark."

Clark. Avis, Stan thought, could probably speed things up as well as slow them down. Clark was to have stayed home today, to wait for them. Avis and her men had waited until everybody but Clark had left, then they had turned on the field and aged the house and Clark by a hundred years in five minutes. It explained the skeleton, it explained the dust, it explained the crumbling cellophane and the yellowed curtains that powdered at the touch.

And the day on the ramp in Chicago. Avis had speeded things up, then. What had seemed to him to take half an hour, had actually occurred in minutes.

"How come we're not standing still like the others?"

"Neutralizers—they're built into your belt. If they weren't, you could have died a long time ago. Our own fields shield Reynolds."

He broke off.

"Here they come!"

ACROSS the street, a figure darted from one parked car to another. A man suddenly ran behind the car that was poised

on the corner. Stan could make out other figures moving behind the windows across the street.

There was the familiar spanging sound and a series of holes stitched themselves in the fragments of glass left in the window frame, three inches from his cheek. There was an impression of speed and heat and a crackling sound as the tiny projectiles thudded into the plaster behind him.

A pale, violet glow flashed out from Tanner's window and one of the figures on the street suddenly raised its hands in agony as flames crisped its clothing and burned its flesh. It staggered a few feet and finally fell in a flaming mass, its screams of agony splitting the still air.

Stan let his breath out slowly. He hadn't got a good look at the figure and for one brief moment he had thought it was. . . Avis.

Which was an odd way to feel about a woman who would gladly slit his throat, he thought.

"One!" Tanner said grimly.

Stan flamed one of the automobiles and narrowly missed a small figure which scuttled out from behind it. He stole a look at Tanner. The man's face was flushed and shining, a half grin of expectancy was painted on it.

He himself did it as a duty, Stan thought soberly.

But Tanner enjoyed killing.

The spanging sounds sounded harder. Outside the window frames, Stan could see gouts of concrete and stucco being chiseled out of the walls. There was practically nothing left of the frames themselves but splinters of wood, held in place by small lumps of disintegrating mortar.

They were taking the house apart, he thought. They were dissecting it as casually as you would a frog, until the entire front part of the room would be exposed and there would then be no place to hide.

He turned up a notch on his heater and sprayed the other side of the street with a wide angle beam. There was an abrupt cessation of noise and then it started in again, louder than before. The small bedroom was becoming foggy with concrete and brick dust.

He caught sight of a figure moving behind the shrubs across the street and took careful aim. There was a sharp cry and then he had to dodge quickly back inside the window. Something had grazed his cheek, cutting it so a thin stream of blood angled down from the cheek bone.

He waited a second and stole another quick look out.

Two men had taken refuge behind some trees, further down the

block. He took aim, then hesitated. The frozen figures of the two boys who had been playing catch were directly in the line of fire.

He tightened his finger, then sweat crept into the corners of his eyes and he blinked for a moment. He took aim again . . . and wavered slightly. The sweat was heavier down and he could feel it soak the shirt on his back. Once more. . . only apes. . .

"What are you waiting for?"

Stan calmly chose another target.

"The apes that are hiding—they won't stay there forever. They'll move someplace else and when they do, I'll get them."

TANNER laughed and aimed out the window. A moment later, two blazing torches had crumpled to the asphalt. Almost simultaneously, the trees went up in flames and two fiery figures stumbled out from behind them.

"Don't ever let your emotions interfere with your better judgment," Tanner said shortly. "Mr. Ainsworth wouldn't like it. Neither would I."

Stan hardly heard him. It didn't mean anything to him one way or the other, he kept telling himself. They were apes.

Just apes.

"What will the apes say when this is over and they discover the shattered houses and the bodies?"

Tanner picked off another running figure.

"There'll be no bodies. The wind disperses the ashes as soon as the field is let up. As for the rest — the apes are ingenious in thinking up explanations. They never believe in anything they haven't seen themselves."

The room was thick with dust and the noise of the spanging; the front wall was holed in half a dozen different spots. Then there was a rush of figures across the street and Stan caught his breath. In the lead was Avis, black hair streaming, urging the others on. . .

Tanner suddenly ran to the back of the room and pushed the bureau and the bed over by the front wall. He stripped the closet and piled the clothes by the furniture.

There was a lull in the spanging and a quiet sobbing suddenly filled the room. Stan turned.

Reynolds had collapsed in a corner, half out of his mind with fear. Tears straggled down the big man's face and sobbing convulsed his chest.

Tanner gestured to the front wall. "Get over there, Reynolds!"

The frightened man half

crawled, half stumbled over to the tumbled furniture.

"You wanted an explanation, didn't you?" Tanner asked sharply.

Stan knew what was coming. Reynolds had ended up by knowing too much. Which was just too bad for Reynolds.

Reynolds' frightened babbling gradually made sense.

"Get me out of here, Mr. Tanner! Please get me out of here. . ."

"Gladly," Tanner said grimly. He brought up the heater and a violet beam danced over the crouching man and the bureau and the piled clothing. There was a short, pitiful screaming and then flames shot high into the room and billows of smoke curled casually through the broken windows.

SOMETHING inside Stan felt sick and he cursed himself for his own weakness.

"Get the suitcase and let's go, Martin."

The suitcase.

It wasn't there. While they had been busy at the windows, Stan thought, somebody had stolen the case. Reynolds hadn't even seen them and even if he had — the ape was now beyond questioning.

"It's gone?" Tanner laughed. "Avis is an amateur, Martin. And a bungling amateur at that! She could have killed us again and in-

stead she preferred the case! One call to Ainsworth and we'll replace that tomorrow!"

They were feeling their way down the back stairs when the thick feeling to the air disappeared. Suddenly the street was filled with screams as passersbys noticed the instantaneously ruined house and the burning cars and the suspicious mounds of ashes that swirled up into the morning air.

A block away, Stan stopped and wiped the sweat and soot from his face. Tanner looked at him sharply. "Something wrong?"

"Yes, there's something wrong!" Stan swung around and grabbed Tanner by the lapels, crossing his hands so the cloth was drawn tight around Tanner's throat and his knuckles dug into the flesh.

"I haven't been getting the answers," he said in a thin voice. "The girl's no ape — she knows too much, her weapons are too far advanced, her men are too well organized!" His voice started to shake with nervous reaction. "I'm supposed to be running the operation down here and I don't even know what's going on!"

"The answers should have occurred to you," Tanner said, his face a mask. "We're not the only ones who want this planet, Martin!"

Not the only ones! Stan relaxed his grip and let his arms hang lim-

ply at his side.

"Avis is an Aurellian," Tanner went on. "Her system and ours have fought many bloody battles for this planet. We're still fighting them—down here, now." He paused. "You haven't been told everything — operators are fed knowledge bit by bit, when they can fit it in. As a Thuscan agent, Martin, you're told just as much as the high command thinks necessary!"

His voice softened, became more persuasive. "We kill but not blindly, Stan. This is an important war—it's a war for an entire planet. We have to be brutal but the stakes are high. We're fighting to capture this planet for our own. . . flesh and blood."

"I'm sorry," Stan whispered. "Forget what I did."

He wouldn't make the same mistake again, he thought. He'd do what he was told and he wouldn't forget that Avis and all of her kind were his implacable enemies, the enemies of his people.

But there was still something that bothered him.

In talking to him, Tanner had sounded like somebody he had heard once before. . .

CHAPTER IX

THE nightmares started in Beirut. Stan's apartment was

a modern one, just a block from the American University. He had opened the wood-slat Venetian blinds and had gone to bed, feeling dead tired. It was late August and things had not gone too well. Agents had disappeared. Fusion packages had disappeared from their hiding places.

But worries could not compete with physical exhaustion. He was asleep as soon as he hit the pillow.

The nightmares were terrifying. He was no longer Stanley Martin, patriotic agent for the planet Thusca. He was 17 years old once more, playing in the city streets of Chicago and fighting in a pillow fight with his older brother and running errands for his mother or watching her while she made meat loaf and took loaves of freshly baked bread from the ovens.

And then there was the smell of printing ink on freshly printed papers and reporters yelling "Copy boy!" at him and the twice weekly trips to the stockyards to pick up the live stock reports.

The stockyards. He had stopped by an alley one morning and three men had jumped him, slugging him in the stomach and kidneys and hitting. . . hitting. . . hitting. . .

He woke up, shaking. His pajamas and the bed sheets were soaked with perspiration. He sat

on the edge of the bed and held his head in his hands.

He had dreamt that he was an ape.

He got up and went to the bathroom for a glass of water. He didn't go back to sleep.

The nightmare the next night was different. Once again he saw two small French boys playing in the street. One moment, thin, bandy-legged kids in short pants and berets. . . the next, two blazing torches that crumpled silently to the asphalt.

And then there was the hideous, horribly shrill screaming of Reynolds when Tanner had played the heat gun over him. The terrible screaming that Stan knew would haunt him for years. . .

He woke up again, rolled to the side of the bed, and was sick.

The nightmares, the goddamned nightmares. . . He fumbled for matches and cigarettes on the bed table. The tiny flame of the match shook nervously in the gloom of the bedroom.

He *had* to stop them, if it meant dosing himself with drugs before he went to bed. He couldn't stand the dreams, he couldn't take the false memories that kept cropping up.

The next night he made up his mind. There were pieces still missing from the puzzle of who he was.

There were things, he felt sure, that Tanner had never told him. Things, no doubt, that the high command had felt he wasn't ready to know yet.

A good agent wouldn't question higher authority, he thought slowly, sweating. But he *had* to know them! He had to know the answers, he had to know about his first 25 years of life.

And there was one person who might be able to give him some information. One person who had once called him a traitor, who had implied he was a renegade and had been conditioned. One person who knew things about himself that he didn't.

The girl, Avis.

Eventually, he had to find her—to kill her. But right now, he wanted to find her to get information.

HE got dressed, set the dial of the transport-hoop for London and stepped through. Tanner was waiting for him on the other side.

"Where is she?" Stan asked.

Tanner raised his eyebrows. "The North American continent. Chicago."

"Exactly where?"

"I don't know. . . exactly. We've been trying to trace the radiations from the fusion package but it

keeps moving about the city." Tanner grimaced. "We haven't been successful in following it. We've lost quite a number of agents trying to follow it, as you know."

He stood up and fished in his pocket for a pipe and a small pouch of tobacco. He looked very casual, very urbane, Stan thought.

"You going after her, Martin?"

"That's right—I'm going after her."

Tanner studied him curiously.

"You're taking a risk. Our agents will locate her sooner or later."

"They haven't so far," Stan said sarcastically. "Why leave it to chance?"

Tanner shrugged. "Good luck." Then he added seriously: "Don't talk to her, Martin. Don't give her a chance to pull something. Kill her on sight."

"I'll do that," Stan lied. He checked his heat gun, then worked the dial on the hoop once more and stepped through the shining oval. . . .

. . . onto a street on Chicago's south side, a few doors down from the Hyde Park theatre. He walked into a nearby drug store and made a phone call, then walked back to the corner to wait. A moment later, one of his chief lieutenants, Caldwell, drove up.

"We lost Jones and Hagerty, Mr. Martin—just a few hours ago.

I was making up a report on them when you called."

"You got the indicator?"

The man held out a small gadget that looked a little like a light meter. Stan swung it around experimentally. A small light mounted on it flickered briefly. He swung it back again and the light glowed, went out, and then glowed strongly again.

"You know, I don't see how you trace a person with that," Caldwell said, curious. "How does it work?"

There were a lot of things that Caldwell didn't know, Stan thought. He didn't know that the deal was anything more than a smuggling operation, he didn't realize that this was not a gang war but was one for much higher stakes but if his curiosity kept up, some day he would stumble on the truth.

Which would be rather fatal for Mr. Caldwell.

"You're paid for what you do, Caldwell, not for being curious."

"Okay, okay—I just asked."

Stan slid into the back seat. "Let's go."

Caldwell threw the car in gear and they drove silently north through the crowded streets. The light on the small indicator waxed and waned and grew steadily brighter as the faint radiation from the fusion material increased.

"You don't want to get too close," Caldwell said suddenly. "That's what happened to the other boys. They got too close and then they were ambushed."

The indicator light slowly increased in brilliance, then started to die again. They were about three blocks away, Stan thought, passing it at right angles.

"Okay, Caldwell, let me out here."

"You sure you won't need help, Mr. Martin? I could get some of the boys. . ."

"Wait on the corner. If I'm not back in an hour, then notify Tanner. He'll know what to do."

He got out of the car, palming the indicator in his hand. Avis—or at least the package—was somewhere in the area.

He glanced at the indicator and started walking, stopping occasionally to look in a store window and steal another look at the indicator. A block and a half down. One door, two doors . . .

And back one.

An office building. The usual miscellany—dentists and doctors and small professional firms.

He walked in, his eyes documenting everybody in the lobby. Any two or three of the men idling in the lobby could be her men, he thought.

And if any one of them had

made a false movement, there would have been a sudden massacre.

"Top floor, please."

The elevator crept slowly up and let him out on the fifth floor.

The reaction on the indicator was strong. He went down to the fourth floor where it was stronger, then down to the third.

The second floor and the light dimmed slightly. It was the third floor then.

He walked quietly back up the stairs and paused at the landing, listening. There were no sounds of anyone in the corridor. He walked casually down it. A doctor's office, a dentist's office, a hairdresser's, and an employment agency.

The employment agency, he thought sharply. The perfect front, the perfect cover.

The perfect way to recruit agents.

He stopped quietly outside and unlimbered his heat gun from its shoulder holster. He turned the knob and walked in.

And was suddenly aware that all noise had stopped, the air was heavy, and the dust motes in the stream of sunlight that lanced through the window were perfectly still.

"YOU took a long time getting here, Martin."

She was standing in front of her desk, looking exactly as when he had seen her on the ramp in Chicago and on the street in the Paris suburb. A tall woman, a little on the thin side. Thick black hair that hung loosely about her face, making a frame for a pale skin and cold, green eyes. It was a hard, capable face with just a suggestion that at another time and another place, it might have been a beautiful face.

Now . . . A drawn face, with a tinge of sadness to it.

Stan leveled his heat gun. She didn't move a muscle but patiently waited for him to press the stud.

Don't talk to her, Tanner had said. Kill her on sight. But he hadn't come to kill her. Not yet. Not before he found out some information.

He lowered his arm.

"Don't tell me you've finally gotten sick of killing people," she said quietly.

"No doubt it runs into hundreds," Stan said sarcastically. "I suppose any day now the apes will be getting suspicious."

She shook her head, bitterly. "Not—they won't. It happens all the time. People die in lonely little rooms, people have accidents, people commit suicide. Or so the Terrans think. They never seem to look beyond."

"You forget," Stan pointed out. "We've lost men, too. And I'm sure that not all of them died from natural causes."

"Who have you lost, Martin? Thieves, dope peddlers, murderers, and worse? And what have I lost? Patriots, scientists, statesmen—the few who understand and believe and are willing to work with me."

Stan shrugged impatiently. "You said I had taken a long time in getting here. I suppose you planned it that way."

She looked surprised. "Why else do you think we stole the fusion packages? Just to keep you from replacing them? The Thuscans can supply you with all the packages you need. We wanted to give you something by which you could trace me."

"It's a wonder you weren't killed before this."

A half smile broke the granite lines of her face. "Nobody but you would have gotten this far, Martin."

"So you got me here. What do you want?"

She looked at him thoughtfully for a full minute, weighing him.

"I want you to change sides, Martin. I want you to help us."

He stared at her in disbelief. "You must have known I wouldn't agree—even before you asked me."

"We need your help," she said

steadily.

"You're doing all right."

"We're losing," she said, her face looking even more pale. "We've lost close to three hundred agents and we've located only ten fusion packages. I don't know your exact time table but I know it's sometime in November. It's late August now." Her face twisted. "We haven't got a chance, and you know it!"

"That's right," he agreed. "You haven't got a chance. What do you want me to do? Sell out?"

"You've already sold once," she said brutally.

There was that hint again, he thought sharply. The hint that she knew something about himself that he didn't. Or at least, she thought she did.

"Why should I sell out to a group of aliens?" he asked curiously.

"Because we're not a group of aliens," she said calmly. "Because this planet is *our* planet, everybody on it is an Aurellian. And so are you!"

"You expect me to believe that?"

"It's true!" she blazed. "But you've been conditioned! You believe everything the Thuscans tell you and you've never questioned it. Now it's time somebody told you the truth!"

SHE leaned closer to him and he caught a trace of faint perfume. "This whole world could go up in smoke, Martin, and it actually wouldn't be important. Not to the Thuscans and not to my own people. You know why? Because it's a sidelight! An unimportant little skirmish in a battle your mind couldn't even conceive of!"

"You're lying," he said, without conviction.

She walked to the window and gestured outside.

"This Earth—it's not the home of the human race, Martin. It's a colony planet—colonized thousands of years ago, like a hundred other systems. For the last fifty thousand years, Aurelia has expanded throughout the galaxy. We don't keep contact with all the planets we've colonized—we can't. Our mission was to sow the human race far and wide and let them develop as they would.

"That was a mistake." She walked back to the desk. "Eventually we ran into the Thuscans—your so-beloved friends, Martin! They were expanding too, towards us. We had to fall back to try and defend our primitive little colony planets. And that wasn't easy. It wasn't easy at all."

Her face clouded and the look of sadness deepened.

"We had been peaceful for too

long. And we weren't professional militarists. And we were so few. So pitifully few! The most we could hope to do was to combat the Thuscan system of infiltration, and then try to convince each planet of its own peril, so they could look to their own defenses."

Stan sneered. "You haven't been successful, have you?"

"What do you think would happen if we showed ourselves and set down a ship?" she asked curtly. "Most of the planets would be paralyzed with terror! They'd consider us suspect and they would hate us because we were more advanced. I do what I can. I try to convince a few. And when I do, they usually try to help." She looked at him again and her face was sheer hate. "Patriotic men, Martin—men that you've helped to slaughter!"

For a fraction of a second, she looked like she was going to break down. Then her face hardened again. Her voice was husky.

"I've manned the barricades on a thousand different planets, Martin! I've fought the Thuscans for as long as I can remember. Sometimes I've succeeded, more often I've failed. And when I've failed, I've had to run away." Her voice changed to steel. "But I'm not running anymore. If I lose, I'm staying here."

"You picked the wrong person to give a speech to," Stan said coldly. He started for the door and then stopped. "You said I was an Aurellian, a human being. What did you mean by that?"

"You were born in this city 25 years ago," she said in a low voice. "You worked here, your family lived here. You had a mother and a brother named Larry. You were . . . exceptional. All the indications are, that you would have made a great man. You loved the world and the people in it. When you were seventeen, you were kidnapped by the Thuscans and conditioned to what you are now. They intentionally made you lose your memory, so that you would have no memories and no will—no will but theirs."

"I don't believe you," he said heavily.

"You don't want to." She paused. "You better leave, Martin. You better go back to the marionette makers and the string pullers."

He took one last look, realizing that something inside him was struggling to give the girl comfort, to say something that might help her. Then he shrugged and walked out the door.

He was two blocks away before he realized that both he and the girl could have killed each other at almost any time.

But neither of them had made any attempt to.

CHAPTER X

HE was two men, after the meeting with the girl, Stanley Martin, the loyal Tuscan agent who continued to mastermind the betrayal of a world.

And Stanley Martin, the man who wondered at and was repelled by his own action. The man to whom the city of Chicago was strangely familiar. The man who distrusted Tanner and who knew there was a reason for it. The man in whose mind small bits of memory kept bobbing to the surface, like a ship that was breaking up beneath the sea and planks and spars kept rising to the top.

He also knew that that way lay . . . madness. Two minds could not continue to dwell in the same body. He could not continually war with himself. The weaker, the fainter of the two would have to die.

Which meant that the person who had brought his weaker memory to the surface would have to die.

Avis was slated for death.

He worked at it consciously and carefully. One of the fusion packages was planted in a small store in Chicago, near the intersection of 63rd and Halsted. One of Avis'

agents tried to pick it up and was killed. Two more tried the next day—and failed.

The word filtered out that the package was a special package, that its importance overshadowed that of other fusion packages. But no more agents tried for it.

By the end of October, opposition had apparently dwindled and faded. Avis had vanished from sight. There were reports that she had been seen in Stockholm and once that she had been glimpsed in a Moscow suburb. Then the reports ceased entirely.

Stan was not deceived. Avis would try once more, he thought. She would try for the package in Chicago. So he prepared for her, for the final ambush.

The 31st of October, agents were reported filtering down to the intersection and Stan decided to step in personally.

He stepped out of the circle of shimmering light in an alley near 63rd street. Nobody noticed him at all. People were streaming past him, racing through the alley to get away from the intersection. Stan grabbed a man running past him.

"What's going on?"

The man was sweating with fear, his eyes rolling wildly.

"Christ, Mister, don't go out there! They got guns that shoot flames and there's fifty people ly-

ing dead in the intersection! All in a minute, I'm walking past on my way to Sears and all of a sudden the streets are loaded with corpses!"

Stan let him go and raced up the alleyway. He could hear the quiet, singing noises of the heat guns and the rapid, spanging gunfire of Avis' men. She had come out in the open, trying desperately to convince the apes that they were threatened by alien groups. She had turned off the time projector halfway through the battle and it must have seemed like carnage had sprung up instantaneously.

There were at least two dozen crumpled figures lying on the pavement near the intersection. Some were crisped to near ash and others had been blasted with the spanging pellets. Two cars were blazing furiously and the windows in Sears and Wieboldt's had been shattered.

A pellet whizzed past his ear and he ducked low, glancing swiftly around the intersection. A thin, violet beam was playing from a doorway in Sears and he dodged towards it, ignoring the other spanging projectiles that ripped through the air and caromed off the building walls behind him.

Tanner was in the doorway, nursing a bleeding shoulder, his

face glowing with the joys of battle.

"Tanner, what happened?"

"She's playing it in the open," Tanner snarled. "She's trying to convince the apes that way!"

She might succeed, Stan thought slowly, but it was more likely that the apes would blame it on a gang war of some kind. They wouldn't believe the truth. They wouldn't want to.

Tanner pointed down the street a block. "Cover it down there and we'll try to drive them towards you!"

Stan raced down half a dozen doors, then suddenly stiffened. There was the wail of sirens. And then the heavy chatter of a machine gun and the drifting choking of tear gas.

The spanging sounds and the violet beams suddenly stilled and figures slipped quietly from the buildings towards the side streets. Stan hesitated and then started running, away from the intersection.

He collided with Avis when she darted from a doorway. The granite face had broken and tears were streaking down it. Before he realized it, he was holding her tightly around the shoulders while she sobbed into his chest.

He had been fooling himself all along, he suddenly knew. He

couldn't kill her. He couldn't come anywhere near to it.

He didn't want to.

"In every game," he said quietly, "there has to be a side that wins and a side that loses."

Her sobs broke off and she looked up at him, shaking her head to clear the hair from her face.

"I'm not crying because I've lost," she said quietly. "I'm crying because . . . a brave man is dying! Because so many brave men have died!" She paused and the lines of weariness etched themselves back into her face. "I should have told you, Stan. I should have told you long ago. Maybe it might have helped."

She pointed to the intersection. "He won't . . . last long. Go out and say good-bye."

HE stared back at the intersection. It was quiet now, powdered concrete dust settling slowly out of the air. Police were circling among the quiet forms lying on the pavement while curious onlookers began to form a ring around the corner.

He walked quietly back to the street.

"Over here, Stan." The voice was faint. "You better . . . hurry!"

A figure was slumped by one of the cars, its whole left side a singed and blackened mass of

ash.

Stan walked over to him. The man coughed and spewed a gout of red over the front of him. "We always wondered what had happened, Stan . . . Mom and me. And then Avis found me and told me you had sold out." The low hacking cough again and a spasmodic heaving of the chest. "N . . . never believed it. You weren't the type." His eyes closed in brief pain. "Told her that a hundred . . . a thousand times, I guess." He paused for a moment and Stan thought he was gone. Then the eyes flickered open.

"I was g-gonna break the whole story in tomorrow's editions. Guess . . . your man got wind of it."

Stan couldn't bring himself to look down at the left side where the clothing was burned and where half of the waist was carbonized. He knew Tanner's work with the heater and he knew how well the man liked to see his victims squirm.

The cough started in again and suddenly the man was sitting up, his face twisted with pain and tears. "*Y-you don't even remember me! Y-you d-don't even remember your own damned brother!*"

And just before he died he said: "I'm s-sorry, Stan. God bless . . ."

And then he was gone and Stan knew that the man he was holding was nothing more than dead clay. He crouched there, his face wet,

and the bits and tiny pieces of personality that had once been Stanley Martin coalesced and recombined into the individual they had been eight years before.

He stood up, the tears streaming down his face, and looked down at his brother Larry. A flood of memories were surging back. The games they had played, the arguments they had had, the way they had stuck up for each other . . .

And he could remember that morning when he had been slug-ged and the Thuscans had picked him up. Mr. Malcolm and Mr. Ainsworth and Tanner and the knives and the machines that had broken his spirit.

Somebody tapped him on the shoulder. A policeman had his notebook out and was looking at him curiously.

"You knew this man?"

"Once," Stan said slowly. "A long, long time ago."

He turned and walked up the street.

"Hey, you can't go! We need your help for questioning!"

He had more important business, Stan thought. With Mr. Ainsworth and Mr. Malcolm.

And his fellow renegade, Tanner.

A VIS was waiting for him in the alley, standing in the shadows by the circle of whirling black. Her

face wasn't the collection of hard planes and angles it usually was and he realized dimly there was a beauty about her he had never appreciated before. A beauty and a certain sympathy . . .

He stood helplessly and looked at her. There was nothing he could say.

There was nothing to say. He had betrayed his world and she knew it.

"It's not too late," she said quietly.

He shook his head. "It's all over but the gloating." He felt himself start to shake. "*My God, I've condemned a world to death!*"

"You can stop it."

"There's no time!"

"There's four days."

Four days, he thought wildly. Four days in which to recover fifty fusion packages hidden in cities that circled the globe. Four days in which he had to baffle his own agents. . . and Tanner.

"I'm only one man, Avis. I could try—but I wouldn't make it!"

"If you want help," she said, "all you have to do is ask."

She still had her own organization, Stan thought. It wasn't as large as his own but its members were willing to die for a cause and they were brave and courageous. They didn't have the advantage of the transport-hoops, but then they

were already spread out around the globe. It would be easy for Avis to communicate with them.

All he had to do was to give her the locations. And then, between himself and her agents . . .

It might be possible at that.

"All right, he said grimly. "Let's try it." He checked his heat gun and the two of them stepped through the shimmering haze . . .

. . . into the apartment in Bristol. He cautioned Avis to be quiet, and then opened the door silently into the living room. Tanner wasn't there but his lieutenant, Langerman, was. A small, wiry man with a rodent's face and sliding eyes who preferred looking at the small of a man's back rather than looking him straight in the eyes.

It had been necessary for Tanner and he to include one man in their confidence, one man who would hold down the fort in Bristol and watch the panels that marked the location of the fifty fusion packages and the agents.

Langerman was sitting by the fusion package panel, reading a newspaper.

He looked up when Stan stepped into the room. "How's it going, boss?"

"It's going all right," Stan said casually. He reached into his pocket for some money. "How about going down to the corner and hav-

ing some lunch sent up? Anything that looks good."

LANGERMAN grabbed the coin, shrugged, and sauntered towards the door. "Sure thing. Sandwiches and tea."

As soon as he was gone, Stan motioned Avis into the room and started writing down the exact locations of the fusion packages. Suddenly there was a voice behind him.

"Hey, what's going on? How'd the chick get in?"

Langerman had come back, his shirt faintly splattered with rain drops. He had gotten as far as the front door, Stan thought, discovered the state of the weather, and come back for a rain coat.

Nothing was going right . . .

It was too late for explanations. Langerman's hand had snaked beneath his suit coat and come out with a small pistol.

"Tanner would like to hear about this," he said, his eyes narrow.

He should have thought of that long ago, Stan thought coldly. Tanner hadn't trusted him, never had. Tanner had watched him. And when Tanner wasn't around to do the watching, he had made sure that somebody else was.

He didn't argue. He straightened out and dove for Langerman's legs. There was a sharp report and a splintering sound behind him and then Langerman was down, franti-

cally trying to hit Stan in the face with the pistol butt.

Stan rolled him violently against the wall and grabbed for the hand that held the pistol. He caught it and tried to force it back. The two arms wavered, then Langerman began to give a little, his arm moving slowly back.

A world was in the balance, Stan thought grimly, and with a surge of strength he had the pistol. He slashed at Langerman's head and the little man went limp.

He stood up and thrust the list into Avis' hand. "There it is—all fifty. I've marked the ones I'll try to work myself."

She took the list and started back to the whirling circle.

"We'll meet again?" he pleaded.

"Right here," she said calmly. "On November 4th."

He watched her disappear, then worked the dials for another destination and stepped through to the unknown.

He had four days, he thought, in which to save a world.

Four short days.

CHAPTER XI

THE night clouds rolled across the steeples of Bristol and the muffled voice of a church clock somberly rolled across the city, striking the hour of ten. The

hush of a chill autumn night lay across the city, mantling the fog that started to deepen in the city streets.

In a small apartment on Regent street, a box-like machine sat quietly in a corner, staring at the growing gloom with fifty red, unwinking eyes.

At five minutes after the hour, there was a flickering and then there were only forty-nine. By eleven o'clock, the eyes had been cut down to forty-six.

The evening of the first, there were only thirty-nine.

By the third, there was only a dozen. And every hour that went by saw another light wink out . . .

He stood in a Moscow subway station, watching the trains thunder past and keeping an eye on a trash can in a little niche near an elaborate mosaic of Malenkov. None of the comrades, he thought, would think of depositing litter near the mosaic of the leader and so the can had never been used.

And since the cleaners knew it was never used, there was no earthly reason why it should have to be disturbed and emptied. So the can sat there and had never been touched.

Except once.

For a moment the platform was deserted and Stan walked rapidly back to the can. A moment later he held the fusion package in his hand

...

Somebody barked something at him and he looked up, startled.

A few yards away, there was a man in the uniform of the people's police. He could have been hiding for any one of a number of reasons, Stan thought. He could have been watching for petty thievery or perhaps there had been a drive against littering the platforms.

But it didn't matter why he was there. The point was he was asking questions in Russian and Stan couldn't answer him.

Another train roared in and people poured out of it, crowding together on the platform. Stan turned and darted for a washroom, breaking the wrappings on the fusion package as he ran. A moment later he had snapped the detonating wires and broken the delicate, clockwork mechanism and the almost infinitesimally small transceiver.

He threw the remains of the package under the wheels of the train at the same time a pistol shot roared above his head, chipping off some of the tile of the ceiling.

Then he had made it to the washroom door, passed his hand over a brass plaque, and darted through the circle of black that appeared into ...

... a dark corner of a bazaar in Damascus.

The bazaar stretched down both sides of the street, terminating against a mosque at one end. There were small, open shops that sold copperware and incense burners and large metal dishes, ornately tooled. There were tables and boxes of elaborate mosaic work—tables with veneers of rare wood and inlaid with mother of pearl. There were small restaurants and notion stores and shops that displayed bolt after bolt of silk and brocade.

STAN watched the people wandering past, then brushed past a small native boy begging for coins, and walked into one of the silk shops.

"Yes, M'sieur?"

"You're holding a bolt of brocade for a Mr. Liebman. May I see it please?" Stan flashed a card.

The little clerk waddled to the back of the store and returned with a small bolt of silk. Stan reached for it but the small man held it back.

"You are Mr. Liebman?"

Stan was sweating. "I'm a friend of his."

"I'm sorry, M'sieur. I was told not to release this to anybody but Mr. Liebman."

The little man wanted to stand and argue while the world went up in flames, Stan thought. He pulled out his wallet and slid a five dollar

bill across the counter.

"I don't think Mr. Liebman would want this quite as much as I would."

The little man was not convinced. "Perhaps not but. . ."

Stan thrust out the flat of his left hand and pushed the clerk back against the shelves. Bolts of cloth rippled down from them and Stan had to dig beneath them to get the one he wanted.

A moment to open the bolt and cut the wires of the package and then he was out in the street once more, the clerk's shrill, indignant screams echoing after him.

He raced to the end of the street, near the mosque, for the dark corner that looked a little too dark and a little too glossy and then . . .

. . . out again in a small street a block from the Vatican in Rome. It was early evening. Twelve more hours to go, he thought, for the last one. That wouldn't take long and he could double-check any that Avis' agents might have missed.

He hailed a taxi and sped out to the ruins of the old Forum. He waited until the taxi had left and then walked over to the column of Trajan—the tall, marble column that had been erected in order to commemorate the victories and the accomplishments of the old Roman emperor. He vaulted the

low iron fence that surrounded the column and broke the lock on the door that led to an interior stairway.

The package was still in its niche at the top of the stairs. Stan tore at the wrappings and pulled its teeth, then crushed the package in his hands. That was the end of . . .

There was the sound of racing footsteps up the winding stairwell.

HE flattened himself against the wall until they came into view, then launched himself down the stairs, landing squarely on the chest of a burly man so they both rolled down the steep flight of stairs.

Tanner had finally gotten wind of what was going on, Stan thought sharply. But it was too late to do anything about it now. The invasion had been set, you couldn't stop a fleet once it rolled into motion. The overconfident Thuscans would land—to discover to their shocked surprise that there was organized resistance.

Mr. Ainsworth's "apes" wouldn't be a pushover . . .

"Bastarde . . ."

The burly man wasn't alone. There was another at the bottom of the stairs. Stan twisted his body, holding the first Italian in front of him. There was a pistol shot and the sound of a bullet smacking into solid flesh. The man whom Stan

held screamed shrilly, his eyes flaring wide.

Then all three of them were down. Stan leaped for the door and slammed it after him. A moment later he was sprinting through the low midway of tumbled arches and forlorn columns of the glory that had once been Rome.

He caught another taxicab by the Colliseum, slipped the driver the contents of his wallet, and sagged against the cushions exhausted.

A shot shattered the rear window of the cab and he felt vainly in his coat pocket for his heater. It must have fallen out during the long fall down the flight of stairs, he thought. Which meant that he was defenseless.

He left the cab a few doors down from the alley and sprinted into the darkness, another shot whistling past his ear. He was almost up to the circle of shining black when the bullet plowed into the fleshy part of his back and he half stumbled, half fell into the pool of whirling blackness . .

CHAPTER XII

“YOU *didn't succeed, Martin. Come on—wake up so I can tell it to your face. You and the rest of the apes have lost forever!”*

He stirred and gagged and then

rolled on his side, feeling the pain from his shoulder lance through his body. There had been the shot and he had felt himself falling and then there had been a voice. . .

Tanner's voice.

His eyes jerked wide open and he sat up, wincing at another flash of pain.

“Finally awake, are you?”

He turned. Tanner was on the small pedestal that held the hoop, standing nonchalantly in front of the circle of whirling black.

“You'll be sorry you woke up, Martin. Frankly, I should think you would be wishing you were dead.” He half smiled to himself. “There's knives in the kitchen, incidentally, in case you should want to do something about it. I imagine you have quite a guilt complex.”

Stan whipped his head around to look at the small box-like machine that kept score of the fusion packages. Only one light was still lit.

The light for Chicago.

Tanner smiled lightly. “Don't think you've won just because there's only one light left. Fifty fusion packages was our safety factor. We actually only needed one.”

Stan's face mirrored what he thought and Tanner read the look.

“That's right,” he nodded. “Only one. We wanted to create panic and

one will do that. When it goes off, that's all we need. The rest of the world will hear about it seconds later. And then the flight will be on." He paused. "You don't think that people—anywhere—are going to remain in their cities, do you? All the police, all the commissars in existence, couldn't make them do that. And then the air fleets will spring into action. One fleet because it demands vengeance, and the other because the only defense is a good offense, as the ape politicians are so fond of saying."

He shrugged. "You see? It really only takes one for disaster."

Stan gathered his muscles for one last lunge. . .

Tanner caught the movement and raised his eyebrows.

"You wouldn't want to do that, Martin. For one reason, I've got Avis. And for another, it would be too late. The blast went off ten seconds ago."

He waved and stepped into the blackness.

Stan reeled over to the set and dialed Chicago. The sheet of blackness formed, wavered, and then faded back to the edges of the hoop.

He had lost, Stan thought, dazed. The city he had been born and raised in was one with the drifting atoms of the air.

Tanner had won, completely.

And Tanner had Avis.

Stan huddled in the center of the room, his mind a melee of flickering thoughts. Then a noise at the window caught his ear. The noise of doors slamming and the starting of a thousand automobiles and people running through the streets. He didn't bother to look—he knew what it was.

The exodus of a billion people from ten thousand towns and cities was on the way.

There was six hours to go before the start of the brief, abortive war. Six hours before the air fleets would arrive at their destination.

A day later the Thuscan fleet would settle from the skies to begin the mopping up operation, the operation that would change the face of a green, water world to a world that would be another colony planet for Thusca.

A world in which the human race would play no part.

And there was the matter of the girl. . .

THE noise outside the street was a steady roar, now. The street was gorged with people on foot and on bicycles and in automobiles, fighting to get out of the city. He could hear screams and curses and over all, the faint crackle of flames.

In a few hours, the city would

be a roaring inferno, he thought. There would be nobody left behind to put out the fires. And the scene would be duplicated a thousand times over before the sun went down.

And the next day there would be the final, terrible tempest when the Thuscans arrived. When humanity would go out in a short, confused struggle.

There was nothing left to do but prepare to die. . .

Then he thought again of Avis and knew there was one last, forlorn chance.

He raced back to the communications room and pressed the switches on the small television set with which he and Tanner used to communicate with Mr. Ainsworth on the Tuscan flag ship.

Avis had mentioned that her own fleet was standing by. A small fleet perhaps, but certainly not one without possibilities.

He waited a moment for the tubes to warm up, then dialed the frequency Avis had once mentioned. There was a pause and the screen grew bright. A face wavered on it for a moment and then grew steady. It was the face of a middle-aged man dressed in a dull blue uniform. His eyes looked like they had seen all there was to see of both heaven and hell.

Stan explained the situation urgently. The face nodded acceptance of what had happened.

"Can you get out of the city?"

The sounds outside were a steady roar now. Stan hesitated a moment, then said yes.

"We'll try to pick you up. Take the main artery out of the city to the small wooded park."

"What are you going to do?"

The lines in the man's face deepened. "Outside of pick you up, there's nothing we can do."

Stan flicked off the switch and started for the door. So there was nothing they could do. Nothing they could do to save a world or to save Avis.

Well, that remained to be seen.

HE opened the street door and was almost swept into the tightly packed, fast moving throng. He stepped back into the doorway for a moment, letting the fighting, struggling mob sweep by. A father held a squawling baby high above his head. A woman was crying, hugging a small bundle of clothes to her as she struggled on. Suddenly she slipped and fainted and slid beneath the thousand feet of the mob. Stan didn't see her reappear.

He closed the door and ran to the back. The alley was crowded but not nearly so packed as the

street.

Perhaps half an hour had passed since Tanner had appeared in the hoop, he thought. He had five and a half hours to go before the bombs started dropping.

His back pained him and he could feel the blood start to well where he had been shot. He grimaced and struggled on. A man next to him was lugging a small, portable radio and Stan could hear the frightened announcer reading off the government's mobilization orders and exhortations to remain calm.

They were useless, Stan thought bitterly. They could have no more effect on the tidal waves of humanity leaving its cities than Xerxes had on the ocean, when he had ordered it to be whipped. Humanity was leaving its huddling places and there was nothing that could stop them.

An hour later and he made two miles through the packed outskirts of the city. The crowd was thinning now and he thought he could make out the wooded sections of the park, not more than three or four blocks ahead. It couldn't be too much longer, he thought. He wasn't sure of how much more he could take . . .

His shirt was torn and the wound in his back was bleeding freely. Worse than that had been the sights he had seen on the way—

women and children trampled underfoot, and the few neurotic souls who had given up and taken the short way out by leaping from windows.

It was slaughter, even without the war, he thought. Humanity was destroying itself in senseless panic. And then he was in the wooded area that had grown close to the city. He pushed through the brush and trees until he found a small clearing. The mass of people streamed past it, anxious to put miles between themselves and the buildings that so obviously spelled destruction.

He had waited for perhaps an hour when a small life boat rocket put down in the clearing. He looked at his watch before stepping aboard.

Time had narrowed to three hours.

CHAPTER XIII

THE war rockets from Avis' home system of Aurelia stretched through space like a thin, red string. There were more than a hundred there, Stan thought, but he knew without asking that they were hopelessly outnumbered by the Tuscan ships.

The small rocket manuevered over the lead ship—a hatch slid back—and the rocket settled slow-

ly through the opening.

A moment later and Stan was in the main cabin, facing half a dozen tired looking men wearing the same dull blue uniform as the man on the screen. They were supposed to be fighting men, Stan thought, but they didn't look the part.

They looked more like frightened civilians who had been drafted.

The man Stan had seen on the screen introduced himself as Elal and smiled wryly.

"We're not the professionals you've associated with until lately, Martin. Fighting is something new for us. It will be a while before we achieve the hardened look of the warrior race."

His voice was soft and tired. The voice of a man who had lost his spirit, who had ceased to hope.

"What's the situation?" Stan asked.

Elal shrugged. "You should have been able to size it up quickly. We are outnumbered—about ten to one, I would say. We had been hoping until the last minute that perhaps Avis would succeed, that she would be able to prevent the subversion of the planet."

"Just what would that have accomplished?"

"You Terrans are not without the means of defense," Elal pointed out. "In many ways you may be backward and primitive but you

have deadly weapons. And a planet, strongly organized for resistance, would be very difficult for the Thuscans to take over. They have never succeeded in storming one outright. They have always had to rely on infiltration."

"Your weapons aren't puny either," Stan said. "You have the time fields."

"They have limited application—they are good for only small fields and only for short times. And the Thuscans have neutralizers."

Another man, who looked oddly familiar, spoke up.

"What's happened to Avis?"

Her father, Stan guessed shrewdly.

"She was captured by Tanner."

There was a short silence and the men looked oddly helpless.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Stan burst out. "You're the only hope that's left!"

Elal shrugged. "What is there to do? We have you. Perhaps you will be of help, if you can remember much of Thusca. So far as we know, you are the only man who has been there and returned. Outside of . . ." And then he broke it off.

"You're going to leave the world go by default?" Stan asked coldly. "And Avis, too?"

The group of Aurelians looked annoyed. "What would you have us do?" Elal asked. "We gambled and

we lost. We are outnumbered ten to one. And this is not the only world we have to worry about, Martin. There are a thousand others."

"And you'll be outnumbered at each one, won't you?" Stan asked grimly. "You'll be continually retreating but the odds will never get any better. As your ring of defenses collapses and allows you to concentrate more and more, the area the Thuscans have to concentrate on will be steadily getting smaller. You have to make a stand for it—why not here?"

"It wouldn't work. We would lose. And we're far too large a part of our total fleet to take the risk."

They wanted to give up because it looked bad on paper, Stan thought. They didn't want to see blood spilled, they didn't want to get their fingers dirty.

"Where's the Thuscan fleet?"

THE young man at the controls worked the dials of a screen which lit up to a luminous black. There was the Earth at one end of the screen—a green globe the size of a basketball—and then the star-flecked, velvet sky.

Stan watched a small collection of brilliant lights move slowly across the screen. The operator pressed another button and that segment of the heavens suddenly leaped for-

ward into the viewscreen. The collection of lights swiftly evolved into the glowing, rod-like ships of the Thuscans. They were arranged into a triangle, a large, reddish colored ship at the apex.

Mr. Ainsworth would be on that ship, Stan thought. Mr. Ainsworth and Mr. Malcolm and maybe even Tanner.

It was . . . logical that Tanner would be there. His work on Earth was done. And it was probable that Avis was on the ship with him. She would be valuable as a hostage.

He stared thoughtfully at the screen. It wasn't a neat triangle, it wasn't a really militaristic formation. The files of ships were a little straggly, as if their commanders weren't really expecting any opposition. From any quarter.

"We could go down," Stan said thoughtfully. "We could force the lead ship to land in Europe. It would be Exhibit A, it would stop the war. You would have time to make explanations and if I know the . . . apes . . . they wouldn't be such pushovers after that."

"You think it would succeed?" one of the men asked sarcastically.

"There's always the element of surprise," Stan said bitingly. "It's probably the last thing they would be expecting you to do." He paused. "You say that you are outnumbered and your weapons are not the

best. Have you ever tried the oldest one of all—courage?"

There was a dead silence.

"You're being very inspirational," Elal said after a moment. "But I don't think you're being very practical."

Stan glanced around the compartment. The pilot was young. He looked expectant, and somewhat hopeful. He would be willing to dare, Stan thought. The others had never fought a war, they didn't know how.

Stan turned to the pilot. "Take it down—towards the lead ship in the Thuscan Fleet!"

"How do we know he's changed?" a voice bleated. "Maybe he's still in league with Thusca!"

Stan turned, the blue of a heat gun shining in his fist. "I have no time to argue—but it's not true." To the pilot: "Take it down!"

"You forget that I'm the leader here," Elal said quietly.

"You've abdicated your position," Stan said softly. "A leader is a man who can lead. You can't. *I* can." His eyes blazed.

"We're going down!"

CHAPTER XIV

THEY plummeted through space, towards the lead ship in the Thuscan fleet that was circling ever closer to the planet below. Stan glanced at his watch. Barely

an hour remained before the planet below would be fighting a hideous, futile battle.

Barely an hour left in which he had to accomplish the impossible.

"Look!" somebody shouted. "Look at the screen!"

Stan glanced at it briefly. There was the Thuscan fleet laid out below—much nearer now—and the small, flashing dot that represented his own craft.

Behind him, strung out like a lazy figure C, was the rest of the Aurelian fleet. They were following the leader down, even though they recognized the enormous odds at which they were going to be fighting.

Courage, Stan thought, feeling something catch in his throat. The unknown weapon.

But just how much could it accomplish?

"Contact in half a chrono," the pilot said.

Stan walked over to him.

"Show me how this works."

It was simple enough, Stan discovered. The firing studs for the different, directional rockets could be played like the keys of a piano. And the radar that indicated distance from another object was accurate to the yard.

Stan studied the pilot for a minute, trying to guess at his reflexes. "When we make contact, do exact-

ly as I tell you."

He shifted his gaze to the view-screen. The Thuscan fleet was much nearer now, but the formation was changing slightly. The triangle was more ragged, more uncertain looking. They weren't sure of what was going to happen, Stan thought, and they were worried.

Which was just what he wanted.

"You'll kill us all!" a voice behind him screamed.

"Maybe I will," Stan mused softly. "I don't promise you a thing!" They were brief miles away now.

"Fire left!"

The port rockets lifted the ship slightly and they flashed directly over the Thuscan lead rocket, a bare half mile beneath them. The wash from Stan's rockets flared lightly over the Thuscan ship and then they were pulling away.

"Try again."

The pilot turned the rocket in a circle and headed back. Beneath them, the lead Thuscan ship was belching flame and breaking out of formation, trying desperately to get away from the insane men who were bent on committing suicide.

Stan flashed them again, even closer. There was no place for the Thuscan ship to go but down.

STAN laughed outright and drove it like a dog herding

sheep, hounding them too close for them to bring their weapons into play, and daring death every time he drove at them.

He was courting death and he knew it. And didn't care. The minutes were ticking slowly by and he knew that time was running out for half a billion people on the green globe below.

He glanced again at the view-screen. Space was a tangle of flaring lights and rocket trails. But confused as the picture was, he knew one thing. Surprise and courage had been the elements they needed.

They were winning.

He turned to Elal. "Get the Thuscans on the viewscreen."

A moment later, the picture on the screen faded and another control cabin faded in. The creature in the picture recognized Stan and a moment later the sober face of Mr. Ainsworth was staring out at him.

"You shouldn't be doing this, Stan," Mr. Ainsworth said, his voice sounding bewildered and hurt. "Is this the way you pay back friendship? Is this how you repay hospitality?"

He could listen to the words and know they were lies. He could look at Mr. Ainsworth and know what lay beneath that saint's face. But he still wanted to believe. He wanted desperately to believe. To

be told by Mr. Ainsworth that all was forgiven.

His throat was dry and he was dripping sweat. His conditioning wasn't going to disappear overnight, he knew. It would be a battle all the time. And this was just the first round.

"I'm going to force down your ship and kill you," he said quietly. "But first, we're going to play tag over every civilized capital on the globe. We're going to let them know just what the story is. And then, if the Thuscan fleet still wants to come in, they can go ahead and try it. But I wouldn't advise it, Ainsworth! The apes won't be easy pickings!"

He flicked off the set. They were in the atmosphere now and the air was screaming past the hull. He could feel the temperature inside the cabin rise and then the refrigeration went into action.

They rocketed over the ocean and then they were over London, a bare five miles up. The ships and their exhaust were clearly visible to the frightened millions camping outside the city.

Stan drove the Thuscans over Paris and Moscow and Tokyo and Washington, timing his rocket blasts and forcing them whichever way he wanted them to go. He threatened to crash them from above if they tried to leave, and threaten-

ed to ram them from below if they tried to land.

Governments watched, frightened at the scene and realized what must be waiting out in space. Huge planes that had been winging over arctic wastes and across vast stretches of sea suddenly got crackling messages that forced them to turn abruptly in their courses and head for the nearest air field — whether it was friend or late enemy.

Far out in space, the void was filled with hulled ships and flaring rockets that suddenly mushroomed into gigantic explosions. Down below, Stan drove the Thuscan ship around the world and then towards Europe again.

He finally forced it to crashland in the Tiergarten in evacuated Berlin.

HIS own ship landed a block away.

The dazed officers in the compartment looked at him for guidance and he realized that he was still the leader, that they still didn't quite know what to do.

"You'll go out that airlock and you'll fight them," he said crisply. "Hand to hand, if you have to. But you'll have to fight them — and to kill them." He strode to the airlock. "Good luck!"

There was no motion about the other rocket and he thought for a

frightening moment that everybody on board had been killed. Then he realized that they were waiting for him to make a move, to show himself for an easy target.

He found a hiding place behind a bit of rubble and adjusted the stud on his heat gun.

They weren't going to stay in their ship long, he thought. He would *make* them come out.

He turned the stud to high and aimed the gun at a port near the control room. The crystal in the port colored, glowed, and suddenly fused. Stan could dimly make out the control console and flashed his heater at that. The violet beam touched the controls and they turned red and fused. Then the beam caught a thin fuel line in the console and there was a sudden spurt of white heat.

Seconds later, the fuel tanks erupted with a roar that showered bits of red hot metal over the whole area.

A moment more, he thought . . .

The air about him was suddenly thick with lancing, violet beams and he felt one touch him lightly on the shoulder, crisping the flesh and setting his shirt on fire. He winced and beat out the flames, keeping an eye on the hatch.

Then the hatch flew open and figures boiled out.

The slaughter was brief, and

very thorough. But of all the creatures that boiled out of the hatch, Stan didn't see the two he was looking for.

When it was all over, he walked out to the field and glanced at the bodies. There were none that looked like Tanner or—thank God—Avis.

He was touching one body gingerly with his foot when the young pilot ran up to him.

"There was no action on the other side of the ship, was there, sir?"

"No. Why?"

"One of the ports, sir—fused. And there were no flames near it!"

Stan started running for the other side of the ship. There was the blasted port and then footsteps in the carbonized grass that had been flamed when the ship had landed. He ran quickly over the grass, following the footsteps, then glanced ahead into the city.

He caught one, brief glimpse of them. Two figures disappearing behind some rubble, running toward one of the side streets . . .

And the hoop that Stan knew was in an alley behind the Russian owned and operated department store in the Eastern sector.

Stan dashed through the streets. They were two blocks ahead of him—Tanner and a girl, whom he was half pushing, half pulling.

A beam flared above Stan's head and he ducked and zig-zagged from one side of the street to the other.

The figures turned a corner and Stan fired one last, futile shot at them.

When he finally turned into the street, there was nobody in sight—only the whirling black velvet of the hoop.

He hesitated and then dove through it. . .

. . . to a street he had seen once before. The Street of Lepers in Casablanca.

The street was deserted—there were no signs of either Tanner or Avis. He walked slowly down the street, and then there was a rustling noise behind them. He whirled, just in time to see Tanner and Avis disappear into the hoop again.

He ran and plunged in after them. It was going to be difficult, he thought. He would have to leave the vicinity of the hoop to look for them. And once his back was turned, they would be going through the hoop once more.

HE caught a quick glimpse of Tanner in the deserted streets of Barcelona, Spain. He almost ran into the two in the empty streets of Shapghai. Madrid, Paris, Stuttgart, Leningrad, Los Angeles, Dallas—the cities flashed by like a deck of

cards that was flicked past his eyes. The unending succession of black velvet hoops through which he moved like a man traveling through an infinity of dimensions. . .

And then the apartment in Bristol and Tanner was there, waiting for him. Simply standing against a table, waiting. Avis was in the far corner, her face frightened and drawn.

Stan paused, eyeing the situation.

"It's been quite a chase, hasn't it?" Tanner asked.

Still the urbane Mr. Tanner, Stan thought.

"I caught you, though, didn't I?"

"It all depends on how you look at it. Perhaps *I've* caught *you*."

Tanner held an unfamiliar weapon in his hand. Stan looked at it curiously and then knew exactly what it was. Tanner had gotten hold of Avis' time pistol. He was going to kill him like William Clark had been killed.

Tanner was going to age him a hundred years in a second.

"Think you'll get away with it, Tanner?"

"Why not? There's nobody to stop me!"

How many times had he died in the last eight years? Stan wondered. How many times had his life been hanging by a thread, waiting for somebody to cut it?

"Stan! Duck!"

Tanner had been distracted just long enough by the shout. Stan dropped to the carpet and rolled against Tanner's legs. Then they were both on the floor. Stan grabbed for the arm which still clung to the time pistol. Tanner grunted and twisted and then . . .

Stan paled and almost gagged. Tanner was flickering.

In the background, Avis screamed. And then Mr. Ainsworth was looking at him.

"I'm your friend," the creature said weakly.

Stan weakened and almost let go.

"I'm your friend," the creature repeated softly, triumphantly. "I saved your life, didn't I?"

He was lying in the alley again, back in Chicago, lying there hurt and bleeding. And Mr. Ainsworth had come up to help him. Out of all the millions of people in the city, it was only Mr. Ainsworth who had helped.

"I'm your friend," the creature purred again.

That still, quiet morning when the chill air had hung heavy over the city . . .

And then the conditioning was totally gone and Stan felt exultant. He hadn't realized . . .

He gripped the arm harder and twisted and the time pistol went skittering across the carpet.

Mr. Ainsworth looked surprised

and faded back into Tanner. A powerful, cold-eyed Tanner who suddenly wrenched free and bent Stan under him. He reached for a water carafe from the table to bring it down to smash Stan's skull.

Stan jerked his head to one side and doubled his legs under him and lashed out with them, catching Tanner in the chest. Tanner staggered backwards towards the hoop, his foot unintentionally pressing the on switch. The circle of black started to build up.

The time pistol was only a few feet away. Stan snatched at it and turned it on the still reeling Tanner. It caught the creature flush at the same time as he toppled back through the black velvet circle.

Stan's last glimpse of The Enemy was of a suddenly very old and aging man—hair whitened and thinning, lines etched deeply in the face, clothes sagging limply from a suddenly shriveled frame—toppling backwards into the hoop.

And then the solid circle of black suddenly broke and faded into the frame again.

Stan turned on his side and got sick. The Bristol hoop had been tuned to Chicago. Only there was no more Chicago and no more hoop there. But Tanner had toppled through—to where?

The creature that had been Mr. Ainsworth and Tanner was lost

in a space that had no beginning and no end.

And no exit.

CHAPTER XV

THEY stood on a parapet of the first building to be erected in New Chicago and watched the tiny flares of the workmen who had come from all over the world to rebuild the city. It was night — a cool, almost clear night with only a few faint clouds scudding across the face of the full moon. The stars blazed down, a million tiny candles flickering against a background of black.

Avis moved her head a fraction and said: "Do you love me?"

"What do you think?"

After a moment, she said: "I have to go back tomorrow."

"I know."

"I . . . don't want to leave."

"Why not?"

She smiled in the darkness. "You know why not. I don't want to leave you."

He hunkered down on the parapet and she sat down beside him.

"They never told you my last name, did they?" she asked suddenly.

"It's Tanner, isn't it?"

"He was my brother."

He waited a moment, then asked: "What happened to him?"

"He wanted power," she said

quietly. "Our society wouldn't give it to him. So he sold out. Of his own free will—he hadn't been conditioned like you were." She paused. "I suppose as long as there's a human race, there will be people who want power and who will be willing to sell their fellow man to get it."

Stan frowned. "That's why they sent you down to try and stop him, wasn't it?"

She nodded. "I was the most qualified." Pause. "A Thuscan eventually took his place, I know. But I wonder how he actually died. Did you ever hear about him on Thusca?"

"He died a hero," Stan lied.

She smiled in the dark. "Thanks anyways. But I knew him, too."

"They used him as a model," Stan said. "Like Mr. Ainsworth and Mr. Malcolm. There actually were human beings like that. Somewhere along the line, the Thuscans captured them and studied them so they could imitate them. Ainsworth and Malcolm and your brother served as models." He shuddered. "Perhaps on some world there's an imitation Stanley Martin walking around."

They watched the stars for a while and then Avis said: "You're a strong man, Stan. How did they ever . . . break you?"

"A simple technique — brain-

washing you could call it. The Thuscans set up Mr. Malcolm and Mr. Ainsworth and I was the man between. Mr. Malcolm was the enemy, Mr. Ainsworth was the friend. Mr. Ainsworth would 'rescue' me from Mr. Malcolm. There's no quicker way to build up a friendship. I felt obligated, in a sense. And then there was torture. . . and machines. When my memory came back, I thought I had it all figured. I only made one mistake. I never thought Tanner was a Thusan."

"He fooled a lot of people, including myself. You shouldn't feel bad."

"But I do! If Tanner had been a real human being, then they would never have needed me. . . . Clever psychologists though they were, they had to work through a human agency as a safety factor. If Tanner had been real, they could have done it through him."

"You broke the conditioning," she pointed out. "How?"

He smiled. "That morning when they jumped me. They beat me up for half an hour and nobody came to my rescue. Nobody but Ainsworth. Even in Chicago, people don't stand by and let a 17 year old kid get killed by three men. Tanner had used the time pistol. What had seemed to take a half hour for me actually occurred in

seconds. Nobody could have helped me if they had wanted to!"

HE stared moodily at the sky. "You know, there isn't much here for me, Avis. I lost my whole family when Chicago was wiped off the map. Larry had died before then, of course." He lowered his voice to a brooding sadness. "And the indoctrination I had, it hasn't entirely worn off. Sometimes I think of people as. . . apes again."

"What do you want to do, Stan?" Her voice was cautious.

He stood up and waved at the sky.

"I'm going back with you! There's a thousand worlds up there I've never seen, a thousand adventures I've never had! And there's still Thusca!"

She laughed softly. "Anything else?"

He ran his fingers through her hair and brushed her lips. "You know better than that. . ."

"We leave tomorrow," she repeated after a moment.

He kissed her softly and then lay back on the parapet and stared at the flickering stars overhead. A breeze came in off the lake and tugged at his hair and he imagined it sweeping on, blowing to a thousand worlds he had never seen.

And a thousand adventures he had never had. . . .

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Raymond E. Banks* ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

writers sink and drown by the hundreds.

On October 4, 1952 I realized this and went up on the firing line as a private soldier and stayed there. I rose and still do at 4:30 AM, writing until 8 AM, reserving the freshest hours for writing rather than job. I narrowed down entertainment, gave up piddling, lowered the boom on friends that wasted time. As in any war, it was me or them, writing or not writing and failure, in that final commitment must come as physical fatigue or mental blockage, not frustration.

I did not fail. No goal-seeker fails who can give up in order to gain. The first year saw 25 stories

produced and 9 sold. The second year was similar. Some stories weren't so good, but some were, and this is the reward for the writer-reader personality, the satisfying story, the check, publication.

In the third year I must write less and better. Your job, if you read SF and want to write it, is to get up here with us on the firing line. Anyone with the imagination to read SF can write it, I believe, if he will commit himself in the Soft War. Diversions will pin you down as long as you let them. When you put the thing you want to do first, nothing can stop you, nothing, nothing at all.

Raymond E. Banks



Jan 2, 1952



"Boy, am I glad I didn't draw gate duty this week!"



Disaster Committee

by

Raymond E. Banks

In an emergency a man has to be calm and efficient — so when the atomic pile started to blow, Papa Schrader got his drum and marched!

DA- DA- DA- BOOM! DA-DA- DA- BOOM, DA- DA- DA- BOOM, BOOM BOOM!

Dr. Harlan Webb stirred in his sleep. Jesus, the racket— He jerked awake—

DA-DA-DA-BOOM! DA-DA- DA- BOOM! DA- DA- DA- BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

He came out of bed with a thump, his knees hitting the floor, his heart leaping to his throat, his mouth dry with sudden fear.

Disaster Committee!

He ran to the window, flinging sleep away from him like a forgotten blanket. Already he could feel the heat. He threw open the window and the drum beat slapped his ears.

DA-DA-DA-BOOM! DA-DA- DA- BOOM! DA- DA- DA- BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

A siren cut loose with a horror-

bearing wail. Lights sprang on all over the asteroid colony. Figures appeared in the streets, some running in pajamas.

Below him Mrs. Mcready from across the street ran along crying out something, naked from the waist up, her dried-up bosoms flapping in the dim night under the dome.

Webb's tele flashed now—imperative red.

He went to the tele, nerves held steady by a voluntary ice-control. It was Sergeant Scollins.

"This is the Pile, sir. The Pile's going!"

"Is it a call for the complete Disaster Committee?"

Scollins eyes on him were the eyes of a man on a sinking ship. "Yes sir. A call for the full Disaster Committee!"

Even knowing that twenty-thou-

sand people were going to be dead shortly, Webb couldn't resist a jibe.

"Well, this should be the last time we have to put up with Dr. Schrader and that goddam drum of his."

"Yessir. The last time." The young man's eyes were bright with agony. It wasn't much fun to be twenty-four and unreeling the last few moments of your life.

Webb felt light-headed as he dressed. All the problems of life bubbled and boiled around you, and you fought and struggled. Then one night without warning you awoke to the drum-beat and a siren, and the other problems vanished as dust; there was only the thought that mighty Death held you at last firmly between forefinger and thumb.

Strange things were happening on the streets of the tiny asteroid, Point Paradise. A man was throwing furniture out of the window. A man and woman were embracing on a front lawn. A silent family group kneeled on their porch, praying. Everywhere people were running, running. Doors burst open, windows crashed, a boy lay dead in the streets, cut in two by the wheels of a carelessly driven vehicle.

The siren went dead and the shouting rose.

THERE was a neat, well-ordered plan for just such an occasion.

It took into consideration each and every mother's son of the twenty-thousand residents of Point Paradise. Given a day's time, the ships could be mustered and the residents lined up for a safe take-off.

There wasn't going to be a day.

There was going to be only a few hours, maybe only an hour. The Pile was going fast. Webb could feel the heat of it clear over at his house.

DA- DA- DA- BOOM! DA- DA- DA-BOOM! DA-BOOM, BOOM BOOM!

Schrader and his drum. The stupid old man was parading the streets, confusing and frightening everybody. That added a crazy touch to the whole affair.

Webb felt the weight of the revolver at his belt. In a sudden flare of anger, he wanted to shoot down the old man when he saw him.

"I don't want to die! I don't want to die!"

A man burst out of the adjoining street and threw himself on Webb. The hands had the grip of a madman's.

"Please turn off the Pile, turn off the goddam Pile!" screamed the man. "I don't want to die!"

"Jack Moffit," said Webb harshly. "Snap out of it. Get yourself over to the Take-off and stop acting like a hysterical child."

Moffit was a friend. They'd spent a thousand hours in Webb's pleasant study arguing philosophy. Moffit was a mystic, Webb a realist. Moffit had a good mind—

Only Webb wasn't talking to Jack Moffit. He was talking to an insane man who had japed at him and tried to hug him for safety. Webb was Chief Atomicist for Point Paradise. Webb could turn off that goddam Pile!

Webb had to get to the Pile in a hurry. He hit Moffit with the butt of his revolver. The man collapsed on the street, spitting blood and vomit. Webb felt a catch in his throat. Personality no longer mattered. Bodies no longer mattered. It was hard to tell what mattered.

The Police were doing what they could. There was little they could do, especially when the Police themselves were filled with fear.

You can fight other men, you can fight men in military machines. You can fight fire, flood and hurricane. But how can you fight an inanimate object, intent on becoming a dazzling sun-burst of energy, a fast-moving chain reaction, containing within it a hell-fury that can blast untold millions of bodies into space dust in the blink of an eye. Impersonal, awesome, unmanageable—

For all the centuries people had

had the fear of the atom blasted into the bone and scoured on the soul. Whatever the limits of man's imagination, there at the very corner of his sane mind where the secret, self-destroying dreams are chained, lay this greatest horror of all—to be caught up in the center of an atomic blast.

And here on Point Paradise it was happening, as casually as a cloud in the sky begins to drop rain.

WEBB came to the Pile Building. The heat was fierce. A stringy line of men and women stood there, waiting for him. Of all the persons on the asteroid, he, the Chief Atomicist, was the most important now, and his Disaster Committee was the last court of appeal before death for the people.

Not all of them had come, by far. The cowards, the foolish ones who'd joined the Committee to walk in the parades and sit on the public platform at asteroid ceremonies—these were fleeing with the people to the Take-off. Some of those with families had not come, and Webb didn't blame them.

He himself smiled grimly as he realized that he was married to the Pile and chained to it, for better or worse—without family, without important goods of the world, by trade and tradition he would be the

last person to leave the asteroid. If anybody got to leave this horrible mess, it wouldn't be Webb. His hopes for life were buried at the very bottom of the hopes of the fleeing citizens, the hopes of the Police, the hopes of the other Disaster Committee members.

He remembered the stories of Disaster Committees on other asteroids and planets. Some had been foolish. Some had been heroic. Many, many had died to the last man and woman. Most of them.

He wondered how this thin, fear-stricken line of humans would perform.

And to give it a touch of the ridiculous—here came Papa Schrader!

DA-DA-DA-BOOM! DA-DA-DA-BOOM! DA-DA-DA-BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

Beating on that archaic drum, dressed in full Battalions, like he was assembling troops to fight the enemy. The old fellow's bent shoulders emphasized his out-thrust head, a helmeted head with glaring blue eyes and a slit of a mouth, staring straight before him like a robot, drum-sticks flashing in the lights that had been turned to DAY-LIGHT-FULL, face senile-serious.

The line of the Disaster Committee gawked.

Webb felt a catch of disgust in his throat. Papa Schrader was a

pettifogging, pestiferous old man. And there he stood beating that goddam drum.

Any man with sense would've rushed to the Take-off by now. Schrader as an old man was entitled to be one of the first to escape. He wasn't on the Disaster Committee and Webb decided to drive him away.

Then he saw the amusement in the glances of the Disaster Committee and saw the value of the old fellow's presence in the moments of horror ahead. Most of Webb's Committee were true military men—Papa Schrader was a special joke to them.

On the walls of his miserable shack hung faded photographs of older Schraders. One had been a General on the Plains of Greater Asia. There was a smiling archaically dressed Marine labeled "Tarawa" and another "Iwo Jima" and still another "Guadalcanal." There were older ones and Papa Schrader spoke knowingly of the Argonne, the Meuse and Chateau-Thierry. He even claimed ancestors at Gettysburg and Cemetery Ridge.

But the times were out of joint for Papa Schrader. Today to join the Army you had to understand about relays and circuits and feedbacks and radar patterns. Whenever the war call came, they took the skinny, smiling youths, the ones

who wore thick glasses and read books and had soldering iron stains on their clothes.

So Papa Schrader led the school band. That was the only marching that was left.

Webb decided to let Papa Schrader be. Perhaps he'd be a welcome comic relief. Perhaps only a reminder to themselves that it was the same old Point Paradise, with Papa Schrader goofing off as usual. Let him stay, let him stay.

"We could do with less noise!" shouted Webb, but Schrader didn't hear him and when Webb marched into the Pile building and the Committee followed him with shrugs and winks, Papa Schrader came right on in with them, beating the drum.

MAYOR Twigg was on the tele. He looked like a man whose name was Twigg, but his sweating, fat face carried dignity tonight. After all, he was the Defense Chief as well as Mayor and this was the hour of distress.

"What's the situation over there?" asked Webb.

"A third of our fleet is over at Point Comfort on a trading mission," said Twigg. "It'll take 'em an hour and a half to return. And the hangars here were locked. There was no one on duty. We're just getting out the ships now. We'll need

four hours."

"You haven't got four hours," said Webb.

"The Hangar Night Guard failed us," said Twigg bitterly. "He was sound asleep at home, drawing his pay."

Webb waved a hand. "There hasn't been an effective Night Guard since two years ago when we failed to punish the first derelict."

"What can you do with the Pile?"

"What every Disaster Committee always does. Try to slow it down. No—don't ask me yet what the chances are. I've got to check. I'll call you back."

Just before he hung up, he heard an awful scream coming over the tele, a woman's scream, a death scream. With hurt and anger he wondered why it always had to be this way. Paradise had panicked badly. It was the fear, the deadly fear of the exploding atom that was their burden. People were still running in the streets out there instead of calmly walking to the Take-off. Vehicles dashed around. A man lugged a mattress along, stopping to rest. Webb could see his face from where he sat in the building, a serious concentrated face. The man tripped over a body and kept right on going without looking down, saving his mattress.

Webb wondered how long it

would take Twigg and the Police to round up all the panicked citizens in the streets. It would take too long.

He turned to the computer read-outs. The coal that meant so much to the asteroid was well out of hand. Yesterday it had provided heat to warm the homes of the frozen asteroid. It provided power to break down the space-frozen rock. The rock in turn yielded water. Water to drink, to live by. Water to be turned into oxygen to breathe. Water to be converted into steam to turn generators that made electricity for lights and appliances. All things flowed from the Pile, but what the Pile gave generously in life it could take away in an instant's explosion.

Webb's mouth felt dry when he finished computing. The Disaster Committee could never stop the Paradise Pile now. It was, to put it archaically, a runaway horse with the bit in its teeth. Sergeant Scolins of the Disaster Committee had already led the first group into the Pile room. They wore Pile suits of marvelous design which allowed them to live in that unbearable oven. They shoved graphite poles into the innumerable holes in the floor, graphite that slowed the controlled chain reaction. It was like trying to push a stalled automobile with your fingertips.

The Pile had moved from slow controlled reaction to fast controlled reaction and when it became an uncontrolled reaction—

That was explosion.

EX-Captain Don Harvey broke in and ran, yelling, from his position in the waiting line of DC people, waiting to go into that horrible room with the graphite poles in the next group.

As he went past Webb, the scientist tried to catch him to reason with him. But Harvey struck at him and pulled loose and Webb got out his gun. Panic among the Disaster Committee was just what he couldn't afford. They might possibly hold down the pile for minutes. It was their job to buy minutes. He lifted his revolver.

At the door Harvey ran into Papa Schrader, still beating his drum. Schrader stuck out a foot and tripped Don. His red face with the bulging eyes glared down at Harvey.

"Get the hell back in line—Captain Harvey. Nobody walks out on this one."

Harvey tried to claw his way to the door on his hands and knees, but Schrader kicked him with heavy boots.

"Nobody leaves!" yelled Schrader. "This is the Big One, and nobody leaves!"

The kicks took effect. What man's ego could stand groveling on the floor in front of old Papa Schrader and being kicked by him? Harvey recovered his senses with a jerk and got up, grinning in embarrassment, and went back into line.

"Just trying to kid Papa Schrader," he lied.

Webb sighed with relief as he turned back to his work. A bad moment, that. He doubted if he could've shot Captain Harvey.

While his fingers flew over the papers, drawing up what was needed in the way of graphite poles from the stock-room and plotting out where the poles should be sunk in that hell-room, Webb remembered about Captain Harvey and Papa Schrader.

Captain Harvey had formed the Point Paradise Battalion for the battle on the Moons of Jupiter. Captain Harvey had been the big hero of Point Paradise then—and had taken only the cream of the cream of the fighting men from the tiny asteroid.

Young Timmons, a radar expert, a boy who wore glasses but could quote textbooks backward. Addison Day, that amazing computerman who had a brain like an adding machine. Tom Wentworth who got the highest grades ever registered in the subject of Physics in the

Point Paradise Academy.

These were the fighting men Harvey wanted and Papa Schrader, still in his forties, was crazy to go.

"I charged with Morrison at the Battle of of the Leibnitz Mountains in the Lunar Craters affair," he loudly proclaimed. "I was in the line with Merchant at Point Vallant."

"That was the old Army," scoffed Harvey. "When men still carried guns and slept on the ground and took positions with foot soldiers. We don't do it that way any more."

Papa Schrader made quite a thing of it, getting his neighbors to sign petitions. This they were glad to do, for Papa Schrader, like the Wedding Guest of literature, was always button-holing people to describe some boring, long-forgotten battle. Or showing his missing ear lobe where he'd been wounded.

When Harvey rejected him despite the petitions, Papa Schrader stowed away on Harvey's ship. And the crowd of people who came to cheer the heroes on their way roared with laughter when Papa Schrader was discovered and Captain Harvey bodily kicked him down the ramp.

THE Mayor was back—

"I've spoken to the people; they won't listen. I'm going to put

you on FULL SPEAK, Webb, so that you can talk to the people. We've got to do something to stop this crazy panic."

Webb sighed. He waved young Scollins over to continue the computations. He wondered if this were always so. The Disaster Chief having to waste his time talking to fools instead of doing his job.

"Ladies and gentlemen of Point Paradise," he began, thinking how odd it sounded to call these rioting madmen by that title.

He explained that the disaster was unpreventable. You had to have a controlled chain reaction so the asteroid could live. Neutrons of plutonium blasting off other neutrons, yielding the life-giving heat. You had to have a critical mass. That meant it had to be big enough so the reaction wouldn't happen once or twice, then stop. You controlled it by graphite poles stuck into the honeycomb or body of the mass so that the critical mass didn't react too fast. If it went too slow—it stopped. If it went too fast, it exploded. From time to time, the inert graphite poles were withdrawn to adjust when the critical mass began to drop below the operating level. There was always the danger of it getting out of hand when you speeded it up a little by pulling too many of your graphite poles out. Usually it went all right. This

time it hadn't, and that was the story of the disaster with the Paradise Pile.

He didn't try to minimize the danger. There was no chance now to kill the pile. They could only restrain it until some had escaped and hope for the best. Please be calm and go to your take-off places and wait for transportation to Point Comfort. Space ships had been alerted and were coming here. Your Disaster Committee will work with the Pile as long as possible. If we can hold out for four hours, all would be well.

He didn't tell them that in his opinion they couldn't hold out for four hours.

"That helped," said Twigg a few moments later. "I'm leaving the FULL SPEAK on. Papa Schrader's drum helps too."

Webb raised an eyebrow. Twigg grinned. "Don't ask me. It just sounds very military and efficient. When he was going around the streets before,, people felt better. It gives the impression that something is being done, and we aren't helpless."

Webb wondered what it cost Twigg to say that. Knowing how Twigg felt about Papa Schrader.

There was the time that Point Encounter, a nearby English colony, had engaged in a trade war with Point Paradise. In those

days as now, Twigg was Defense Chief for Paradise. He had turned out all of the men on the asteroid with military experience. Harvey, of course, and his veterans from the Jupiterian eruption. They ran the war from deep bunkers sunk in the rock, using their automatic fighters against the automatic fighters of the English. The English tried to crack the air dome that protected Point Paradise. The Colony tried to defend it.

Most of the people hid in the deep bunkers under the City, and young Timmons with his radar knowledge, Day with his computers and Wentworth with his trajectory theories finally beat the English.

There was a tight moment when Papa Schrader almost lost that one for them. He went out alone in his battered runabout which was crudely shielded for short space trips. His idea was to smash the English Command Cruiser which held all the master controls for the invading ships. Schrader called it by the strange name of "Kamikaze-y."

A good idea, perhaps, except that the presence of his vehicle, cutting across the logical patterns of the Point Paradise fighters disrupted radar, trajectory and target data. Wentworth had had to shoot him down and then came the perilous ascent to the roof of the air dome to bring back the injured

old man.

Twigg had court-martialed Schrader for that one and it was a long time before the frightened citizens of Point Paradise saw the pathetic humor of the old man's bid for heroism.

WHILE Webb had been talking to the people, Scollins at the computer had sent a group of members into the hell-room under Timmons, placing their graphite poles down in the mass. Three of that group failed to return. Their bodies lay on the Pile's honeycomb top where they'd been overcome by the tremendous heat. . . .

There was machinery to set the poles in the floor so that no human ever had to go in that room. But the Point Paradise Purchasing Committee, all non-experts, had seen fit to shave the budget and leave Webb with one grappling hand. One was all that was required on straight operations. You would need more in case of disaster, but the human race always gambled on disaster not happening when it meant saving money. On earth the human race never shored up the river levees enough, never built houses in earthquake districts strong enough, never took all the possible precautions in their plants, mines or airplanes.

It was no different out in space. A grappling hand cost fifty thousand. Disaster suits cost only two thousand. Let the poles be shoved by hand in case of disaster. What really counts is how cheap the job can be done from day to day. After all, people cost nothing and will die anyway but a good safety machine means higher taxes.

Webb made a signal to Sergeant Scollins. Scollins looked at him with stricken eyes. Those three still forms in there were dead. They were dead because their suits had failed. Their suits had failed because they hadn't taken the trouble to check them once a month as required — on the meeting night you had a bridge date, or you had a good book to read or a headache. And you didn't go to the DC meeting that night. . . .

Webb smiled bitterly as he got into his own suit. He himself had been guilty of evasion of duty. He hoped his suit was all right; there wasn't time to test it. But he could hardly criticize his fellows on this point.

He assembled half a dozen and led them into the hell-room. Standing above the Pile he felt a remorseless heat that was stupendous to feel even inside the mechanical marvel of his suit. The room was the size of a house, pock-marked with holes for the

graphite poles. He pointed to the two closest fallen humans for the others to pick up and, with Blake, started for the figure which had been overcome in the far corner of the room.

Faintly through the walls he could hear the drum-beat.

The tremendous heat, the tiny sound. That was the proper relationship between the weak humans and the mighty Pile.

The heat had been growing, growing. It was much worse now. It was much worse than a few minutes ago when Timmons had come in with the first group.

Blake grinned at him through his face-plate and fainted. The others staggered and retreated. Webb was too busy with his own problem to stop them. Now he had both Blake and the man from the last group already on the floor to take care of.

He turned over that first man and saw it was young Timmons. A Timmons who wasn't young any more. Timmons four times decorated for superior radar battle work in various wars, a great warrior name on the asteroid.

This wasn't like a war where you worked in shifts in deep, safe bunkers. This wasn't like a disaster where you had water against fire, boats against flood, shelter against hurricane. This was

different. . . .

OUTSIDE the glass he could see the stunned faces of the Disaster Committee watching. They who had never seen men die by violence.

He thanked his lucky fortune for his scientific detachment. His mind was likely to go off in objective tangents like thinking about Papa rader and the panic in the streets and the terrific failure of the human race to protect itself from disaster rather than worrying about his own personal danger.

He stooped, took a man each by the leg and started to drag them out. The air in his lungs was torture. His head went light with the throbbing.

The room was about fifty feet across. Webb smiled with a sudden drowsy reaction. Funny—the room was stretching out now—a block long—two blocks long—and he was plodding, plodding forever across that crazy honeycomb floor, walking through hell. He had sinned, the world had sinned and he would walk forever, dragging two dead weights behind him.

He could stop walking any time he wanted, but somewhere off he could hear the beat of a drum and General Schrader would shoot him if he stopped marching. The Marshal didn't like his men to give up. The Lord High Command wouldn't

allow—

He recovered consciousness outside of the Pile room, his helmet off his head, and Scollins bending down over him.

"We can't ask them to go in there any more," said Scollins. "There's too much heat."

Webb stared up in mild surprise at the anxious surrounding faces of the Disaster Committee. He flopped his aching arm and saw that he had brought both Blake and Timmons out. They were both dead. He looked back in there and saw that on the last trip others had fallen. . . .

"Why the hell didn't we think of using rope?" he asked, getting weakly to his feet.

"Because there isn't any rope on the whole goddam asteroid," said Scollins. "All we've got is wire. Steel cable, and you can't hold onto a steel cable in that heat."

Another ironic touch, thought Webb. Here you had nothing but metal. Because the asteroid yielded metal in quantity, but hemp had to be rocketed in from Earth — and it cost too damn much.

Papa Schrader had stilled his drum and was leaning forward listening. "You jerks want rope?" he yelled as if speaking over his drum beat still. "I got rope. I got a thousand feet of it at my place."

The members of the Committee looked at each other in remembrance and laughed. Papa Sch-

rader had rope, all right. That was another Point Paradise legend.

PAPA Schrader had been at the Battle of the Lunar Craters on the Moon as a youngster with the 129th Battalion that everyone was so sick of hearing about.

"Just like climbing the mountains on earth," Schrader would tell you, gripping your arm, his blue eyes blazing with the past. "We climbed up ten thousand feet a day. Some of them mountains was sixty thousand feet high if you count the craters' sunken levels as ground. We had to take the high places. . . ."

That rope had been Papa Schrader's final undoing. When General Roberts had come to Paradise to decorate the Point Paradise Scientific War Group for their machine-handling at the outbreak of the Martian Civil War, Papa Schrader had brought his ropes, dressed in his faded uniform and set up his own little display on the Take-off grounds where the asteroid festival was held.

And General Roberts had seen the display and stopped.

"I remember you," said the General, smiling, and Papa Schrader saluted and grinned and the people crowded around to listen. "You were the one we had to drag up the hills of the Leibnitz Mountains with ropes because you were afraid

of high places."

Papa Schrader looked uncomfortable and shifted his feet.

"It all comes back to me now," said the General. "I was a Lieutenant then and you were the rookie we called Soft-Sole Schrader. We tried you out as rifleman but you couldn't hit anything and you couldn't march more'n a couple of hours at a time. Then we tried you as Mess Sergeant but you couldn't cook either. We put you on Kitchen Police, but you broke all the dishes. Then Major Wriswell found out from an old military manuel that the ancient earth armies used to have drummer boys. And so we made you a drummer boy to keep you out of the way of the real soldiers."

Papa Schrader blinked and roared, his blue eyes blazing. "That wasn't me, General. You're mixed up. Why, I was decorated at Point Valiant."

The General leaned forward and peered at the medal on Schrader's chest.

"Oh, yes, the old-fashioned good conduct medal. Given for never having been drunk on duty. Well, perhaps I'm wrong, sir, but the Schrader I knew had the lobe of one ear missing because once when the Battalion was on rest barracks on Mars he was chased by a woman there and when she caught

him she bit his ear lobe off. We never tried her. She said she was trying to make love to him, but he was so bashful he burst into tears and made a fool of her in front of her sister prostitutes. And she chased him all the way back to camp and then he asked her for his money back, so then she bit him. On the whole we felt it wouldn't build up the reputation of fearlessness of the 129th among the Martians, so we never tried her."

And the General and the people looked at his ear with the missing lobe which he always claimed as a battle scar.

After that Papa Schrader didn't wear his uniform any more.

Until tonight.

THEY painted Papa Schrader's rope with asbestoline against the heat and they could stand to hold it where they couldn't hold the steel.

Webb, with a rope around his middle, tamped his graphite pole on the floor and turned to the Committee and said. "Let's go!"

The Disaster Committee hung back. Harvey, veteran of four conflicts. Wentworth who had destroyed tons of enemy equipment and had never seen a man die by violence. Day who was entitled to a Congressional citation from Earth itself but had never seen blood

spilled in violence.

Webb looked at the frightened ring of faces and knew they wouldn't follow him to death. Not when they could see those other bodies through the glass.

"It's the only chance the people have—" he cried to them. "We've got to give it to them—the time they need!"

He turned to Sergeant Scollins. Scollins who had carried on the Point Paradise military tradition for the younger generation. Fresh back from the troubles out near Alpha Centauri. Scollins wouldn't meet his eye. Scollins was a printed circuit man and had won a major battle by designing a new method of pyramiding computers one solid light year away from the actual fighting of the humanless ships.

Webb turned with a sigh to the hell-room. One or two he could threaten, cajole, beg or even shoot. But not the whole Committee. He understood then why Disaster Committees never fared so well. There was no tradition for facing danger on a personal level any more; the machines did everything.

He waited a second for the spark of inspiration, tried to think of some words to say. But he—he himself was a man of the laboratory and of equations and of emotionless reasoning. Any inspirational phrases he shouted would sound

false and only make the laugh.

He shrugged and went into the hell-room alone, hoping that some would follow.

Then Papa Schrader beat on his drum and shouted. "Come on, you sons-of-bitches, do you want to live forever?"

Crazy, corny old phrase, but not corny here where the chips were finally down for the whole asteroid population.

The drum followed him. Stupid old Schrader, the laughing-stock of the asteroid, the ridiculed old man that the kids threw pennies at and jeered, was going to go into the hell-room and sure death, beating his ridiculous drum. . .

Something happened then. Maybe be the shame at seeing Schrader go where they belonged. Maybe an awakening that here and now they had to lay it on the line and pay up their lives in personal sacrifice.

Scollins shouldered Schrader aside. Harvey gave him a shove. Wentworth nudged past him and the entire Disaster Committee filed into the hell-room, leaving Schrader out there beating his drum and crying out snatches of forgotten battle cries.

And Webb found himself mouthing the satisfying words as he started shoving the poles, words echoing in the brains of all the Committee members.

"Come on, you sons-of-bitches, do you want to live forever?"

AFTER that it was a nightmare of walking and shoving the poles and returning. Whenever Webb stumbled—when he could walk no more he felt the tug on his middle and he was pulled out of the hell-room with Papa Schrader's rope. He knew each trip would be his last, but somehow he always picked up another graphite pole again and went back in. It was as simple and as hard as that—they walked to the drum-beat and they all knew that when the drum finally stopped they wouldn't have to walk any more but the drum kept going, going, going.

DA- DA- DA- BOOM! DA-DA-BOOM! DA- DA- DA BOOM, BOOM!

* * *

There was a queer new period when strange faces appeared from nowhere and excited hands took hold of him and walked him off in a new direction.

Then Webb recovered his senses in space. He was seated at a vision panel, staring down on a tiny asteroid, hundreds of miles below. Fat Twigg, Big Twigg was seated beside him. Twigg grinned.

"Well, Doc, we made it fine. We really beat that old bastard of a Pile."

Webb started to speak but Twigg was holding his arm and pointing. Down below a blinding white dot appeared, gobbled up the asteroid and turned it into a sudden sun.

"There goes Point Paradise," said Twigg, laughing.

Webb looked about him at the smiling, relaxed faces and heard the friendly hum of the ship's machinery. He had survived after all!

"Never been anything like it in the history of space," said Twigg. "Of your eighteen on the Disaster Committee we only lost six. We only lost a dozen dead in the panic with about two dozen injured in one way or another. Every living soul got off, including pets and livestock. Almost twenty-thousand. Pretty good, against the usual loss of fifty to one hundred per cent. Your Committee sure held down that Pile!"

Webb could only think of how the men and women of Point Paradise had loved it and lived on it for all the years of their lives and yet in a few seconds of horror they had turned against and were laughing to see it explode, cheated of their lives, paying for its sin.

"Less than twenty dead." reiterated Twigg. "We'll go down in

history as the most efficient Disaster Committee on record."

"It was the drum," said Webb, looking around. Yes, Papa Schrader had survived as he knew the old fool would. He was the kind who did. He sat there now in a seat with his drum between his knees, asleep after his tremendous exertions.

And as various members of the Disaster Committee paraded up and down the aisles they dropped things on the drum-head.

A medal from Wentworth—

Service stars from Harvey—

Sergeant Scollins' gleaming foulard, awarded for distinguished printed circuit designs above and beyond the call of duty.

Lieutenant bars from Day—

The ship's doctor came by. He leaned over and peered at the old man, felt his pulse, opened his eye. Then he straightened and came by Twigg and Webb.

"Too much exertion," he said. "The old man's dead. I'll get a stretcher."

An unknowing Committee member hurried by and dropped a master mechanic's medal on the drum-head. It made a slightly muffled "boom."

Military honors had come late for Papa Schrader.

THE END

An interstellar hunting trip with Major
Daphne could teach a man a number of lessons.
Like being kind to fellow human beings, or—

Never Gut-shoot A Wampus

by

Winston Marks

I 'M not exactly broke, but this Major Daphne owned more planets than I do golf balls. Whereas my mining interests were mostly on earth, the Major got in early on the Centaurus grab. A whole generation later, all I could stake out was one hot little hunk of tropical mud that no one else would fool with.

Daphne liked to kid me about my "galactic empire" every time we collided at the club. I was a bachelor and Daphne was married, but he spent more time there than I.

He was a bear of a man with a bull-moose voice, the chest and shoulders of an ape, the appetite of a goat and the morals of a rabbit. There were few wealthier men in the system and none half so noisy about it. His favorite approach to bragging was to tell of his interstellar hunting expeditions.

It costs money to push even a private boat around out there, and nobody but a fatheaded, ostentatious trillionaire would consider blowing half a billion to shoot a brace of pink-eyed grouse, or travel a parsec to blast a two-ton Lartizian lizzard.

He nailed me one morning in the slime-bath at the club. I was soaking out a hang-over and a few wrinkles in the filthy anti-biotic goo up in health service, when Major Daphne charged in with a towel around his fat middle and plunked down in the next vat. He splashed a gob of the vile smelling green stuff in my face, and I cursed him out.

He bristled at me as he settled his bulk on the sunken stool, "Young man," he growled, "profanity is the luxury of uneducated lackies and foul-mouthed jackals. Which are you?"



"Splash me again and I'll come over and drown you in this snot," I told him.

He squinted under his gray eyebrows and roared, "Oho! It's my empire-builder friend! Say, when are we going hunting on that free-floating pimple of yours?"

When are *we* going hunting! He had never so much as bought me a drink, and all of a sudden we were buddy-buddies. "What's the matter?" I said, "run out of game on your private preserves?"

"Just looking for amusement, my boy, I've put a hole in a dozen of every specie on 17 planets. Covered all my Centaurus holdings, but never did get around to, to — what do you call that little spitwad of yours?"

He sounded serious, and an idea popped into my head. "That little spitwad is Tigursh II, and it happens to be the hottest big animal planet in the system."

"Sounds gamey," he nodded. "Have you looked around it much?"

I had made only one trip to drop off a prospecting party on the north polar plains. That was two years ago, and all the word I'd had since was a couple of double-talking messages relayed from Centaurii III, asking either double wages or immediate pickup and dismissal for the whole party.

Sometime in the near future I must get out there and investigate personally, but I had been stalling the trip to accumulate the liquid assets it took to lease a ship and outfit from the main base on Centaurii III.

"Been all over it," I lied. "It's not much for comfort, but it's hell for targets. Some really big stuff out there." This last was true. In the week I had spent on the edge of the grassy plateau I had seen a number of herds of heavy-bodied four-leggers galumphing about.

"We'll make up a little party," the Major decided.

"Get yourself and your friends out to Centaurii III, and I'll provide a small craft and the gear for the hop over to, to — what did you call it?"

"Tigursh II," I told him happily. This was what I had hoped. The \$80,000 passage out to the system I could afford, and with Daphne footing the rest of the bill I would save myself quite a piece of change.

"How many will be in your party?" he wanted to know. "I'll send word ahead for suitable accommodations and supplies."

"I hunt light," I told him. "There'll be just me."

"Hmm. You must be nuts about the sport. You don't mind if I bring along a little diversion?"

"It's your party," I reminded him, more to confirm that he was expected to foot the bills than just to be agreeable.

"I'll keep my party small, too," he promised. "Just the wife and — a few nieces."

THE Major and his party were already gassed and crated when I arrived at the space-deck for the big jump, so it wasn't until they pulled the needle out of me on Daphne's planet at main base that I got a look at his wife and *nieces*.

From that moment until we put down on Tigursh II, the shuttle trip was one continuous party. Beside Daphne, there were Annellica, his legal wife, and six variously-hued, large-breasted, slender-hipped young women, each of different planetary origin and talents.

When we were gathered in the cushion-lined salon of the Major's "cosy", 200-foot hunting craft, he introduced them in two sections.

"My wife, Annelica," he said with a casual bow in her direction, "and my nieces." His face brightened with pleasure as he regarded them tumbled around on the billowing underfoot. Although their costumes were of different colors they were all of singularly identical design. They wore one-piece dresses, demurely high-necked, puffed at the shoulders, belted at

the narrow waists — and that was all. The flounced skirts stood out as if heavily starched, but they rippled and floated in the diminished gravity with a most titivating effect.

Annellica wore pants.

I said I was charmed, but actually I was appalled, especially when the Major explained. "I only brought along six nieces this trip. Three for you and three for me."

Where, I wondered, did this leave Annellica? The ship lifted under us without warning, and we tumbled about in a gay tangle of giggles and heavy perfume — all but Annellica and me. We were thrown together, and we lay on our sides motionless, nose to nose, staring into each other's eyes.

"Hello," I said. She heaved herself up against the two-gee pressure and leaned on an elbow regarding me with quiet, gray eyes. Her skin was white, but it was still a relief when she answered in unaccented Aminglish.

"Hello!" she answered. "Thank heavens you speak earth."

At our feet Daphne was tumbling up his galactic gieshas with lusty shouts of laughter and gabbling in six different dialects.

"Are you a linguist?" she asked. I shook my head, and she smiled for the first time. "Good!" she exclaimed. "You'll get tired of that

bird-talk and pay some attention to me."

She sold herself short. Conversational boredom was the least likely reason I would seek the company of this fabulous creature. Daphne was completely engrossed with two wriggling, giggling extra-terrestrials at the moment, so I rolled back and took in the rest of my hostess with an indiscreet survey.

In gray slacks and high-neck T-shirt, she presented the ever pleasantly mysterious enticement of the fully clothed female. Already my interest in the nieces and their leggy displays faded in favor of the one possibly forbidden morsel aboard.

I reached out to touch the unbelievable platinum hair, but she frowned a warning. "Look, but don't touch," she said softly. I misunderstood, but Daphne put me right on the subject. He was looking over at us.

"You're wasting your time," he called. "She's colder than a methane popsickle. A real chip off of Jupiter. Let's eat, whadda ya say? Come, Nelly, produce!"

Annelica sighed. "That belly of his! Life is one continuous smorgasbord. Excuse me, Mr. Frost." She arose cautiously against the double gravity, but even under these circumstances not a line of her firm curves drooped excess-

ively. She was, I guessed, early thirtyish, judging from her mature manner, but she was firm and resilient as a girl of 18.

THE nieces had tired of scuffling in the heavier pull of out acceleration and lay with their cunning costumes plastered to their limp, moist bodies. The Major tried a few last tickles, but the responses were unsatisfactory grunts of fatigue.

He hauled himself over to me. "Great girl, that Nellie. She's my gunbearer. By the way, what weapons do you use?"

"Whatever you brought along," I said. "This is your show."

"Good, good! They ought to outlaw these nasty little nuclear side-arms. No sport at all. I'm a powder and lead man, myself. Give me a good rifle any day. Primitive but positive, if you know what you're doing."

In amazement I asked, "You use inert projectiles on unknown game?"

"Certainly. Oh, I've had a few close ones, but I learned my lesson in Africa. I got 'over my impulse to gut-shoot everything that ran at me." He showed me a wrinkled red scar on one shoulder at the base of his bull-neck. "You never want to gut-shoot a lion. He keeps coming. Lead has plenty of impact, but it

mushes up and loses its shocking effect in the entrails. You got to break a bone to be sure on these fast beasties. Same thing's true with most of these Wampuses."

"Wampuses?" I asked.

"It's what I call any fast moving game that wears its skeleton on the inside," he explained. "Some on every planet. Carnivorous. Teeth, claws and a hell of an appetite's about all they have in common. Come in all shapes, but main thing is they come at you fast. A lion covers a hundred yards in a little more than three seconds. Some of these extra-t's do better than that."

I tried to look casual, but the truth was that I had never fired at a living target in my life.

"Never gut-shoot a wampus," he repeated. "Break a bone. That gives you time to finish him off."

Our sanguinary conversation ended with the appearance of a circular tray loaded with food. It slid in silently, supported from a silvery, over-head trestle. When it reached us it lowered to the pillow-ed deck, and the Major fell to with both hands.

He had eaten only a few bites when the uncomfortable plummeting of the food down his gullet reminded him of the heavy pull of acceleration. He threw back his head and roared into the concealed

microphone over-head, "Ease off to one gee, captain. A man can't enjoy his food."

After a brief pause a man's voice answered, "We'll have to replot the orbit, and it will cost us several days at lower acceleration, Major."

"Ease off while we eat, then pick it up again," Daphne snapped, oblivious to the work he was creating for the navigator. "And don't make me heave when you do it, either!"

The pressure gradually diminished to normal earth gravity. Daphne belched with relief. "That's better."

Annelica was back. She and the girls joined Daphne, nibbling at the platters of meats and swallowing copious quantities of a golden, low-alcohol fluid they sucked from collapsible containers.

"Better eat, Frost," Daphne insisted. "Be in free flight for a bit, and you want to keep up your strength. I can't eat well in free flight. Makes me gassy."

I forced down a few mouthfuls of the exotic rations, wondering why a steward hadn't served us instead of Annelica. After the meal the girls began to perform for us — three of them, singing, dancing and producing weird music on tiny instruments they inserted in their mouths. The other three, Daphne

told me, were strictly free flight artists from low gee planets.

Annellica watched for a few minutes then got up and followed the food tray as it drifted away from us. I went after her. In the galley I found her stowing the remnants back into refrigeration. She didn't wait for me to ask the question.

"Daffy dislikes personal servants," she said. "Roboid servers are not practical on the smaller craft, so I take care of our wants."

SHE scraped some half-chewed food into a disposal unit and slipped the plate into a slot: the wife of the wealthy Major Daphne, handling garbage! Cook and gun-bearer!

"You must love him very much," I said.

"Love?" She turned to face me. "What has love to do with — anything?" That was cue enough for me.

I couldn't convince myself she was as frigid as the Major asserted. And I was right. She came into my arms like a hungry tigress. After the most interesting moment of its kind in my eventful bachelorhood, she peeled herself away and went back to her chores.

I gasped, "Lady! What your husband doesn't know about you!"

"And he'll never find out," she

said instantly. "He only holds precious things he can't have. My love — passion — call it what you will, is one thing he can't buy."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," I said. "Why did you marry him if —"

"It was that or die a spinster. Every young man who looked twice at me disappeared. At first I thought Daffy would get tired of being married to a perennial virgin, but I was wrong. It's the only thing that has kept him interested in me."

I said, "I suppose it's a natural form of perversity for a man of his wealth and power."

She wheeled, hands on hips. "Perverse? Yes, he's perverse. And perverted and bestial and greedy, boorish, cruel, inhuman, self-centered, insane, piggish —"

She glanced over my shoulder and stopped. "And a completely devoted husband," Major Daphne slobbered behind me. He reeled through the entry, loose-lipped, dishevelled and very drunk. He brushed me aside and lurched past me, arms outstretched. "My li'l Nellie's only one 'preciates me."

For a second Annellica was a platinum-haired statue, then she moved to meet him, bringing up an expert knee that struck too high to injure him, but low enough to crush the breath from his lungs.

Daphne clomped down on all fours gasping. "He knows better than that," his wife said. It was such a cold-blooded blow that I reacted.

"Maybe if you'd give him half a chance —" I said.

"I'd wind up as a niece," she snapped at me. "*Wait until you see what happens to them.*"

"Shut up!" Daphne rolled to his side doubled up and glared at Annellica. "Shut up, Nellie, before I kill you."

I left the domestic tableau to resolve itself and sought my cabin. I stayed there through the remainder of the heavy acceleration, but when we went into free flight the Major dragged me out.

The party was still in full force with the three other girls doing titivating push-offs from wall to wall, convoluting their lovely bodies into incredible ballet formations which Daphne took keen delight in disrupting with licentious hands — like a spoiled child pricking colorful balloons. Each fiasco ended in shrieks of laughter and mock combat, until the Major was snugged back in his hold-down strap, promising to behave.

Frequently he would raise his arms and aim an imaginary rifle. "Ka-chunk! Broke a leg that time. Ka-chunk! Right in the hip!"

Then he'd holler over 'at me, "Never gut-shoot 'em. Break a bone."

Annellica remained bored and indifferent to the revelry. She drank sparingly and passed up a hundred opportunities to be alone with me. She paid meticulous attention to her husband's wants with the quiet efficiency and anticipation of a trained secretary, but I caught her eyeing me with a most provocative, speculating look. My experience with married virgins was too limited to interpret her glances.

All revolved around the Major. When he ate, we all ate. When he over-drunk and slept, we slept.

I never did discover which three nieces were supposed to be "mine." None paid me any attention, and Daphne, much to my relief, never insisted upon my activity in his Bacchanalian affairs.

BEFORE we arrived at Tigursh II I was quite fed up with my host, drunk or sober. His indefatigable, sensual tastes wore on my nerves, but I still had no conception of the Roman carnival this was to turn into.

We touched down a few hundred yards from my prospecting camp which was located at the edge of the two-hundred-mile plain. Daphne stowed the girls in their rooms like so many playthings, and

the faceless captain announced that the ramp was down.

At the first smell of the hot, humid, over-rich air, the Major rared back his head and said, "I like it!"

I had forgotten the rather exhilarating effect of the high-oxygen content. Coupled with the low-gravity, Tigursh II induced a mild euphoria on its human visitors. My planet was small and dense, and the rapid rotation — once every seven and a half hours — made for violent, capricious air currents and weather.

"I'll hike over to the compound and check on my crew," I told Daphne as the three of us bounced down the ramp.

"Don't bother," he said imperiously. "We passed them on the way in. Meant to tell you. I've been checking on them. You've got a nice thorium deposit, but it's a mile under that mud down there in the jungle." He waved carelessly to the south.

"You what?" I said incredulously.

"They were dissatisfied," Daphne said. "I gave them a furlough with pay. Like to have a place to myself, y'know."

"What goddam right did you have to —"

"Right?" He rolled the word around in his mouth as if it were

a brand new concept. Then he chuckled. "Quit crying. They wanted off. I sent my ship after them. Saved you a hunk of cash. Hauled their samples back, too."

When I failed to respond he continued, "Let's not spoil the trip over it. Tell you what. I'll buy the mineral rights from you. How's that?"

"For a cold billion dollars," I said without thinking. He didn't bat a lash.

"Throw in the exclusive hunting rights and it's a deal," he said.

"She's yours to the core," I said quickly, "minerals, animals and vegetables." The cost of mining the thorium was completely beyond my means and my previous efforts to sell the whole planet had met with offers of less than a tenth of this amount.

He tilted his head back to glance at Annellica. "Get that? Easy to remember. A round billy for the parcel." She nodded, and he turned back to me. "Congratulations, Frost. Now you're a billionaire. Let's eat. I'm hungry."

Annellica produced a small hamper and followed along behind us as we strolled over toward the heavy greenery. I was still feeling weak. Having your only planet jerked from beneath your feet was not an experience I especially savored, in spite of the profit I real-

ized. It gave me a better insight to Annellica's answer to my question. "Love? What has that to do with — anything?"

What Daphne wanted was his. He didn't need the minerals, and he was here at my invitation for the hunting. But — let's not have any unpleasantness. Spend a billion, and keep things friendly!

HE spotted a herd of heavy animals grazing a quarter of a mile away. Squatting, he waved us down in the deep grass. "We'll eat here," he said. "Keep an eye on those herbivores. They're close to the trees. See if anything comes after them."

Centaurus was a faint, golden ball above a high overcast. It was never meridian in the summer season, so the orb hung well up from the murky horizon to the south.

Daphne seemed unaffected by the oxygen, but I had a feeling of well-being that approached intoxication. Annellica moved between us spreading the lunch. For the first time on the trip I felt genuinely hungry and began popping morsels into my mouth before she was finished laying it out.

I ate alone, however. The Major said, "I think I see a wampus."

Without a word, Annellica departed and returned in a minute with two rifles. Strapped to her

side was one of the "nasty little nuclear pistols" that her husband deplored. He took one of the rifles and lined out the telescopic sight in the direction of the herd. I continued eating until he ejaculated, "Blitzmachen!"

On my knees, I could see a brief commotion in the herd, and the gusty wind brought the wavering sounds of grunts and a shrill neighing. A flash of bright orange tore back for the jungle dragging one of the smaller, lumpy herbivores that would have weighed half a ton on earth.

So I was right. There was interesting big game on Turgish II. Daphne sank into a tense silence. Annellica dropped beside me but didn't eat. She sat on her legs, hands folded in her lap while I rustled through the edible hungrily.

Finished, I stretched out in the dry grass that crackled under me, intending to take a nap. Daphne turned his head and whispered with irritation, "You people are making too much noise. Go on back to the ship until I get a line on what we're after."

His wife shrugged, and we turned back, leaving the picnic debris with Daphne.

When we reached the ship, she tossed her head and breathed deeply. "I like it out here. The air — it's — wonderful."

We sought the shade on the far side, out of view of the crouching Major and lay side by side facing each other. It was the first time we had been alone since the moment in the gallery. I was determined not to upset her again, but she kept her gaze on my eyes, waiting, expectant.

This time I answered *her* unasked question. "No. You're oxygen drunk. Besides, there's no future in it," I said bluntly.

"I know him," she said softly. "He won't return until dark. This may be our last chance to — to find out about each other."

"Find out what?"

Her lips drew into a faint pout. "Aren't you curious — about me?"

While I was strangling for an answer she went on, "And I must discover whether you are worth doing now what I must do some day." Her lips were tight now.

"What is that?"

She didn't answer, but she moved her head closely until her breath was sweet in my nostrils. My discretion vanished and I reached for her. Our lips met but she held our bodies apart with her hands.

It was quite different. The kiss was long and exploring and thoughtful and when my pressure against her fending hands grew more than she could bear she roll-

ed free and jumped to her feet.

"It is worth it," she declared looking down at me with clenched fists and wide eyes, and for the first time I understood why the Major remained married to this lovely creature in spite of her rejection of him.

Watching her graceful limbs as she mounted the ramp I felt sorry for Daphne, an emotion I had thought impossible. But here was a man, foolishly wealthy in every respect but the one which counted most.

My pity was short-lived.

The night was short, but we slept less than half of it. Daphne chattered about the orange animal excitedly and made plans for the hunt.

"There are few of them around these parts," he said, "or else the herds of herbivores would be wiped out. We'll have to stake out bait to draw one, probably. Usually have to anyway."

HE cleaned his rifle four times and paced the salon impatiently awaiting dawn. Finally he glanced at his chronometer and told his wife, "Get Suchane — the darkest one. See that she's scrubbed down, well. No perfume, understand?"

It was the first time he had mentioned one of the girls to An-

nellica by name and she paled. I wondered why taking a "niece" on the hunt with us bothered her after the comportment I had witnessed on the trip.

In a half hour the four of us set out in the first pale light of a dawn that exploded quickly into pink daylight. The Major wore a wicked hunting-knife in his belt, carried only a pint flask in his right hand and his left arm was wrapped intimately around Suchane's slender waist. Annellica carried the rifles.

We had gone only a few yards when he stopped us. "You wait here," he said. Then he sipped from the flask and offered it to the beautiful, dark-haired girl. She drank deeply and handed it back. He waved it to her with his satyr-like smirk, that she finish it. He watched until she was through, then his left hand slid up to her neckline, grasped the material of the dress and tore down with one powerful gesture.

She staggered back, nude and startled. Daphne roared with laughter, clasped her around the waist again and held out his right hand. "Nellie, my rifle. You wait here. Keep your heads down. No fair peeking, eh, Suchane?"

Annellica threw one of the two rifles she was carrying at him, muzzle up. He caught it with a

slap of his huge paw and pulled the girl forward with him. She was reassured, now, and giggling with anticipation.

Somehow the lecherous display was more revolting out here in daylight. I mistook Annellica's paleness for humiliation, and I didn't blame her. Why did he have to drag one of his damned concubines out here?

We knelt down obediently, and before Daphne's head disappeared he turned and shouted back, "If the wampus gets by me, remember, no gut shots, Frost."

I muttered to Annellica, "The man has nerve, anyway."

"You confuse bravery with selfishness. He insists on the first shot — won't trust another member of a hunting party to hold his fire. He always stalks out ahead like this," Annellica explained tensely.

I had noticed that the niece carried no weapon. Which brought up another question. "Does he always mix his pleasures?" I asked.

She was in the act of withdrawing a long telescopic sight which she must have had bound to the inside of her thigh. As she mounted it to her rifle with feverish haste she answered, "He is not mixing his pleasures. *Suchane is bait.*"

Before this could sink in com-

pletely a shrill, feminine scream tore faintly into the gusty wind and found us. I leaped to my feet. Half way to the edge of the jungle, some hundred yards from us, I watched Daphne pushing the olive-skinned girl ahead of him with rough shoves. A deeper color spread from her neck and swathed one shoulder and her side.

He stopped and raised the rifle threateningly. She turned and fled toward the jungle.

"What in God's name —" I shouted.

"You can't help her," Annellica said hopelessly. "He's cut her jugular. If there's an animal in there the blood scent will bring it out in seconds. If there isn't — Suchane is gone, anyway."

I stared down at my companion in horror. She had warned me about the "Fate of Daffy's nieces," but I couldn't have visualized anything this bestial.

She looked up at me. "She will faint soon. There are worse ways to die. You will see." She arose to stand beside me.

I threw my rifle to my shoulder, fully intending to fire the whole clip into Daphne's back, but three things happened at once. Suchane sank out of sight in the grass, an orange splotch ripped into the open, and the Major, too, sank

down and levelled his rifle.

The animal, even at this distance, was undoubtedly one of the Major's wampus varieties. It was stilt-legged, but not clumsy like a giraffe. The long, thick neck swung left and right tracing the scent of warm blood, and its cat-like body arched so high a man could have walked under it.

The wind was directly at our back, and as the several human scents touched the animal's nostrils it jerked the long-fanged mouth. Its belly touched the high grass in a quick crouch, then it sprang in one, deadly accurate leap that carried it forty yards to the prostrate Suchane. Even in the light gravity, the orange blur did not rise in a high trajectory, and the Major had time for only one shot while it was in the air.

The sound startled the beast as it settled on its prey, and it raised its ugly head high while Daphne slammed the rest of his ammunition at it with no effect.

Annellica stood calmly as her husband dropped his rifle unbelievably. The heavy caliber bullets had failed to cause a quiver in the beast, but the shocking noise had made him nervous.

At the moment when it seemed he would turn and run for the jungle, Annellica raised her rifle. Daphne saw her sight through the

telescope. "It's no use," he yelled. "We need higher power charges. Got a hide on him like a —"

She pulled the trigger.

The great animal pirouetted, bit at its own side, then wheeled facing us. Even as it sprang, Daphne, who was only twenty yards from us, screamed, "You gut-shot it! You clumsy—"

His wife dropped her rifle instantly after the shot and drew the little nuclear pistol. I got off one shot as the beast reached the apex of its leap, but I think I missed.

I kept waiting for Annellica's deadly handweapon to speak, but she followed the arc of the raking talons all the way to the ground where they churned briefly. Daphne only screamed once.

At last the pistol spat, just as the furry belly touched the grass in its third crouch. The leap came, but it was almost straight up. The slender pellet had entered the chest and cooked half the spine. The aimless floundering was reflexive spasm.

Annellica grabbed my rifle and fired three quick shots at the impervious hull of the ship. It brought the captain and two crew members to help us with the remains. Before they reached us, however, she was quick to secure Daphne's rifle and examine the chamber.

Even with an eye-witness and three other witnesses after the fact, she insisted that we hack the head and claws from the monster carnivore. We packed them, together with her husband's shredded corpse in the game freezer.

When a financial personage of Daphne's stature dies on a strange planet the investigation is most thorough. It wasn't necessary to take such pains with Suchane's pitiful remains. We buried her on Tigursh II where investigators could exhume her ripped body if they chose. The jugular slash was indistinguishable in the general lacerations.

It was a nasty mess. It cured me from any slight pleasure in hunting and cost me the quickest billion dollars I ever had a chance at.

Naturally, the deal was off without the Major to verify the verbal agreement. Anyway, with characteristic selfishness, he died intestate which threw all his holdings into the courts.

But the greatest change the incident made in my life concerned the loss of my bachelorhood. A man can get his belly full of anything, even promiscuity, and Daphne's little hunting party did me that favor.

I'm still stuck with Tigursh II and its mile-under-mud thorium de-

posit and orange-colored wampuses but I have prospects. If the courts clear up the Daphne estate my wife will own more planets than I have golf balls.

So, if you ever go big game hunting again don't forget the Major's advice. I pass it on to you for

what it's worth, although you may never aim at anything but a lion. Never gut-shoot a wampus. It's better even if you're only shooting blanks!

And I don't feel a damn bit bad about the way Annellica loaded the major's gun. . .

THE END



"Man can't live without water!"



Mechanical Medicine



ARTIFICIAL hearts, mechanical kidneys, synthetic lungs—these are not science-fiction's dream—they are reality!

Phenomenal success is being achieved with a host of mechanical developments being applied to medical problems. Doctors are beginning to realize that in applied science and engineering in all aspects of their work (besides obvious posthetics) lies the opportunity to find out what makes men tick and with that knowledge how to heal them.

Most machines, an artificial kidney say, are grotesque parodies of the organs they replace. Huge, inefficient and complex, they do not compare favorably with the natural thing. But when men's lives weigh in the balance, these flaws can be more than tolerated. Already fine engineering practice is reducing these surgeons' tools to manageable size and certain reliability.

Pumps for hearts, cellophane for kidney tissue, enormous oxygenated glass areas for lungs—these are the substitutes. And they do work!



"But Miss Sims, you can't do this to me!"

Monk had enough Devil Egg seeds to retire for life. But there was the matter of the pretty Martian girl, eliminating Luke, and, of course —

THE AAB

by

Edward W. Ludwig

THE cool Martian wind crept across the rust-red expanse of desert. Occasionally its soft touch stirred the thorny leaves of Devil's Eggs — the squat black plants which peppered the silent monotony. Here and there a wisp of sand spiraled upward into the bright, thin morning.

The wind felt clean and new on Monk O'Hara's coarse, blond-stubbed face. He chuckled as noisily as a man buried neck-deep in sand can chuckle.

"Nothing to worry about," he muttered.

"Not a goddam thing."

It was uncomfortable, of course. No man would relish being beaten by hysterical Martian tribesmen, spat on, and buried to roast in the 100-degree Martian noon or freeze in the 50-below-zero night.

Yet the Summer wind from the

melting Polar icecap would insure an endurable temperature through the day. Monk's lungs — enlarged and sensitized after two years of prospecting for Devil's Egg seed — were accustomed to the planet's scant atmosphere. Destruction of his oxygen mask presented no menace.

"Idiots," he mumbled. "The fool Martians made off with the sandcar like kids with ice cream—and left enough Egg seed to buy a thousand cars!"

He was able to turn his head just enough to glimpse the heavy, fat sacks that the tribesmen had dumped out of the sandcar.

The sacks bulged with the fine black seed that, properly processed, made the deadliest, costliest, and most habit-forming narcotic in the System. The sacks were symbols of a shining future for Monk O'Hara



— symbols of fine clothes, beautiful women, choice whiskey and, most important of all, a return to earth.

Of course, it was too bad about the old man.

The white-bearded, toothpick-slim Martian trader and his black-haired daughter had pitched their tent next to his camp last night. The girl had been amazingly full-bodied for a Martian. Her round, firm body and sensual lips made him suspect that she was a half-breed, a delightful combination of

Martian grace and Earthly sultriness.

Monk smiled as he saw her again in his mind's vision.

She slid off her antelope-like *lozelle*, came to him slowly with her small, naked feet swishing through the sand.

"It is all right for us to camp by you?" she asked, her eyes wide. "We will not bother you?"

"Not at all," Monk answered, his heart pounding. After all, it'd been six months since he'd even seen a woman — any kind of woman.

"What is your name?" the girl asked.

"Monk, they call me. Monk O'

Hara." He could feel the blood pulsing through his temples.

"I am Tooli." She curtsied. "You like me?"

"Yeah," Monk, breathed. "I like you a lot."

Later, through the ports of his sandcar, he watched her lithe movements as she and her father set up their tent. Throughout the night, his sleep was thin and restless, his mind on fire with the vision of the dark, lovely face.

So early this morning he'd gone to her again. "How about some coffee, kid? Got plenty in the sandcar."

She crinkled her nose teasingly. "Yes, I like Earth coffee. My bocle come too?"

"No, just you, kid. Your old man's busy taking down the tent."

She nodded eagerly, smiling. "Yes, I come. I like you."

What greater invitation did a man need?

But in the sandcar the little fool screamed. The old Martian darted into the car, yanked Monk away from Tooli, and descended on him like an enraged beast.

Monk hadn't meant to kill the old Martian. He'd meant only to silence his shrill screams and stop the frenzied flailing of his fists.

How could he have known that the thin neck would snap like a rotten stick under his first blow?

MONK'S smile faded. No, he thought, he hadn't acted too wisely. He'd expected the frightened girl to leap out of the sandcar and race away on her *loz-elle* — and she had.

But he *hadn't* expected her to return an hour later with a dozen revenge-hungry tribesmen. His mistake had been in letting her escape. He cursed silently.

Then he spat. After all, it was over and done. The Martians had trussed him, buried him, and left him to die — but he'd at least been wise enough not to reveal his ace in the hole.

His partner, old Stardust Luke, had left yesterday in the auxiliary sandcar to get fresh supplies from Chandler Field. Old Stardust was as honest as a baby and methodical as a clock. He'd return today, late in the afternoon, just as he'd done a dozen times.

There was no doubt about the punctual arrival of Stardust. And Stardust would save him before the freezing descent of the Martian night.

Monk thought for a moment, then chuckled again. His glee more than overshadowed the inconvenience of his neck-deep burial.

For the rescue would be the last good deed of Stardust Luke's life. In fact, it would be his *last* deed. Period. The old space rat had out-

lived his usefulness. If he persisted in wandering over unexplored Martian terrain he'd probably end up in a freezing or sweltering grave anyway.

So it wouldn't be murder — not exactly. It would only be giving a bit of impetus to what already seemed inevitable.

Monk strained his neck muscles to gaze at the sacks of seed. They would all be his soon. Not half, as now. But *all*.

He sucked the cool air deep into his lungs.

"Everything's going to be okay," he murmured. "—no, not okay, but *perfect*."

He closed his eyes, at peace with the universe. He could forget the pressure of sand on his chest, forget the heat that was beginning to shower down on his thick, sweat-matted mop of hair. He could imagine himself in a cool, dark bar on Earth, surrounded by smiling women, sipping iced drinks.

"Ahhh," he breathed, opening his eyes.

Then he saw the Aab.

IT squatted on a small, irregular-shaped dune some three feet from him in the jagged sharp-edged shadow of a Devil's Egg.

Its eyes, like shiny pin-heads of obsidian, were on a level with his.

It was a red-scaled creature,

about three inches long, combining the most significant characteristics of an Earth crab and an Earth ant. Its claws were tiny razor-edged traps on the ends of wire-thin appendages. Even at this distance, Monk saw that its mouth was open — whether in awe or in anticipation of a meal, he did not know.

The Aab rose on its six rear legs as if trying to stretch its dark red body into a position of better vision. It rubbed its fore-claws together. Sharpening them, perhaps? Monk shivered.

For the first time since his arrival on Mars twelve years ago, Monk felt fear. Till now, he'd met no adversary that his strong, bull-necked body could not subdue. Ordinarily, he'd dispose of an Aab by a squishing stomp of his boot. And he'd flower the naked grave with a squirt of tobacco juice.

But now it was if he were bodiless. His broad shoulders, sinewy arms and barrel-chest seemed buried a thousand miles deep in the very bowels of the planet. He was a helpless freak, a living, sliced-off head on an endless platter of red sand.

Fear was an icy bauble in his mind, rising, swelling, forcing out all other thought.

"Go 'way!" he yelled.

The Aab's claws fell to the sand. Monk saw the menacing glint of

the needle-like tongue in the creature's black, open mouth.

Aabs were carnivorous, he knew. They especially relished the soft, tender places of the human body — the lips, eyes, tongue.

Ten minutes of attack by a hundred Aabs would transform a man into a white, clean skeleton. About the bones, the Aabs would lie prostrate, too stuffed to move, their bodies swollen to thrice their normal size.

"Get out of here!" he screamed.

The Aab retreated a few inches, backing into the shadow of the Devil's Egg.

"Go on! And keep going!"

The Aab turned and began to creep away. It responded readily to Monk's commands.

For Aabs were gifted with a rudimentary, if unpredictable, type of telepathy. No interplanetary circus was complete without its complement of the deadly creatures controlled by an expert human telepath.

The Aab continued to needle a path through the sand. It passed through the shadow of the Devil's Egg. It was now some six feet from Monk, a tiny red ball half buried in the desert.

Suddenly a thought echoed in Monk's mind, ever so faintly, like the barely distinguishable sound of trickling water, far away:

I will come back. Many of us will come.

Monk paled. Damn. He'd forgotten. The Aabs, according to biological reports, sent out scouts in search of food. The Aab before him was a scout.

The fear welled up within him, stronger than ever. His body was held motionless in his tight prison, yet inside him he was trembling.

"No! Don't go! Come back!"

He repeated the words over and over in his mind, knowing that the Aab would respond only to the mental impulse, not to the sound of words. Aabs were deaf to the human voice.

The Aab paused.

"Don't go! Don't! Don't!"

Slowly, like a revolving wheel, the Aab turned. Its black, pin-head eyes seemed to bore into Monk's.

I'm going. You cannot stop me. The thoughts, not words, filtered into Monk's consciousness.

"You are *not* going," Monk telepathed. He gritted his teeth, funneling all his strength into the mental command.

The Aab was struggling to break away from the hypnotic chain. Its body was grotesquely twisted, its claws digging into the sand, its head bobbing absurdly.

Let me go. Let me go.

"You can't go. I've got you."

LET ME GO. LET ME GO.

The Aab struggled furiously.

"Damn you, I won't let you go."

Monk hurled the thought at the creature in a fire of desperate fury.

The Aab fell, exhausted.

FIVE, ten, fifteen minutes passed. The wind blew. The hot Martian sun transformed the desert into a sea of glittering scarlet. A mist of sand settled on the inert body of the Aab, camouflaging it.

How many minutes more till the arrival of Stardust Luke? It must be close to noon. There'd be perhaps five more hours. Sixty minutes in an hour, and five hours —

The Aab stirred. It began to rise.

Monk concentrated on the thought: "You can't move. I've got you. You can't rise."

The Aab stopped rising.

Monk licked the perspiration from his upper lip in a futile effort to quench his thirst. But there was nothing to worry about. Nothing at all —

His head jerked back.

The Aab was rising again. It was defying his last command.

Monk bit his lip. Of course. His mind was tiring just as muscles tire. He couldn't hope to hold the Aab here all afternoon. The Aab, somehow, must be disposed of. But *how*?

Out of the heat, out of his fear and desperation, came a plan. It

was simple and direct. It gave Monk his only chance for survival. He quickly pressed it into the depths of his unconscious mind so that the Aab would not detect it.

"Come here," he said. "I won't hurt you."

You will hurt me. You will dispose of me.

Monk cursed. Aabs weren't intelligent, but they possessed some reasoning power.

"No, I won't hurt you," he telepathed. "Come here. Let me see what you look like."

I am afraid. You have a plan.

This time Monk relaxed. He tried to emanate only thoughts of love and friendliness.

"I won't hurt you. I promise."

The Aab hesitated.

"I command you to come here. You will not be hurt."

Slowly, the Aab crawled forward. One inch, two, three, six, a dozen. It was only five feet from him now, and in the shadow of the Devil's Egg again.

"That's it. Come on. Closer."

I am afraid of you. Let me go. Let me go get the others.

The Aab suddenly braked its advance by digging its foreclaws into the sand.

"But you don't want to go back to the others." Monk's lips quivered as he spoke. His words, to human ears, would have been unin-

telligible. "You want to stay here. You want to come closer to me."

His attempt at telepathic hypnosis brought a small, silent reply:

I must call the others. It is my duty to call the others. The others are hungry.

A shudder passed through Monk's hot, tight body. A few minutes ago he had delighted in the coolness of the desert. Now the heat seemed to be pressing down upon him like the fiery hand of Satan.

"You're a scout, aren't you?" he asked. "You find food for the others. You go back and tell the others what you've found?"

I tell the others. The others are hungry.

"But you're hungry, too. Why share what you've found? Why not take it all for yourself?"

No reply appeared in Monk's mind. He continued:

"Come closer. Look at me. You're hungry. You're too hungry to waste time calling the others."

The Aab came closer. It passed out of the shadow of the Devil's Egg. It came to within two feet of Monk. It crossed the small dune. Slowly, slowly, its legs labored through the thin sand. At last it stopped some six inches from Monk's face.

IT appeared immense, like a lumbering, scaly giant from the

planet's billion-year-ago past.

It rubbed its claws together, threateningly. Its black mouth opened, closed, opened, closed. Its needle tongue twisted like a silver snake.

I am hungry, came the thought. So very hungry. But I should call the others.

Combine fear and hope hung over Monk like an omnipresent shower of fire and ice. Sweat dripped into his hot eyes, obscuring his vision.

He opened his mouth.

"Look," he said. "You are hungry." He wriggled his tongue as a fisherman would cast out bait.

Hungry, hungry, hungry, came the tiny voice.

An eternity passed. Monk's heart was a monstrous hammer pounding in the depths of his body and in the depths of the planet. The Aab was motionless save for the restless, uncertain moving and blinking of its eyes.

Then its forelegs lifted. It drew itself forward. One inch, two, three, four, five, six.

Monk beckoned the creature on with his wriggling, twisting tongue.

"That's it!" he telepathed. "Closer, closer!"

The Aab entered Monk's open mouth.

Crunch!

Monk chewed and spat and

chewed and spat. He grimaced hideously. He coughed and choked. The Aab tasted like a combination of paprika and oil. He thought he was going to retch, but did not.

And it was over.

MONK breathed the cool air. His weary mind thought of the stupid white-bearded Martian and of his lovely daughter. He thought of what he was going to do to that idiot space rat, Stardust Luke.

His gaze traveled to the empty red desert where, in about four hours, Stardust's sandcar would appear. It shifted to the sacks of priceless Devil's Egg seed, and he began to chuckle.

And last, his gaze turned to the black, pin-point eyes and the moving foreclaws of the *two* Aabs which squatted some three feet away from him in the jagged, sharp-edged shadow of a Devil's Egg. . .

THE END



"Gad! I never heard **THAT** note before!"

By accident Granger saw the aliens land, so with scientific curiosity he captured one of them. This incident made Earth the scene of a —

Stellar Vengeance

by

Frank Freeman

"YOU must realize," squealed the squat, ugly creature in the hastily constructed wooden cage, "that you're inviting certain destruction by holding me prisoner. I warn you, your time is short."

Walt Granger stomped over to the enclosure and swung a heavy boot against one of the two-by-fours that stood like a crooked row of sentries. "That's my worry," he grunted.

He had stumbled upon the whole business just two hours before, right in the middle of his part of the geologic survey that was going on in the rock strewn hills and gullies known on the maps as the Millsport Range. He had seen the ship the moment it left the ground, and a few yards from the burned circle of grass that was still smoldering from the rocket blast, there sat the fat little specimen of life from another world. Granger

had caught the thing by surprise and had a rope around its middle before it could scamper into the brush.

"My comrades will return for me," warned the thing, its yellowish eyes slowly and rhythmically protruding and withdrawing within their sockets. "They'll have no trouble finding you, and when they do"

"Shut up!" snapped Granger, pulling on his leather jacket. He turned to the cement fireplace and gave the embers a poke with a charred stick, looking around at the cage every few seconds as though he feared leaving his back turned for more than instant.

He looked at his watch. Eight o'clock, and night was fast spreading a blanket of charcoal shadows over the hillsides. He'd wait till morning to move this crazy beast to the next camp six miles away. A

night trip might entail chances he wasn't willing to take.

After a couple of nervous fumbles with a match, he lit a cigarette and glanced uneasily out the one window in the rough cabin. What if the alien, or whatever it was, wasn't kidding about the danger he was in? What if his buddies did decide to come back before morning with the extermination of a human on their minds? Think of it, Granger, he told himself laconically, you'd be a hero! A nice, cold, dead one. And they'd never find the bunch who'd have knocked him off. He'd be one of those "mysterious deaths" the papers played up.

"Free me immediately!" screeched the angry captive, his head swaying like a balloon on a stick. "You haven't much time left!"

"You're a nasty tempered little imp, aren't you?" growled Granger as he strode across the room and peeked curiously inside the crate.

"I loathe you," growled the thing. "I have no intentions of deceiving you. This whole situation is simply a matter of pure logic so far as your plight is concerned."

"You're forgetting," said Granger, his voice lacking a certain amount of its previous confidence, "that you're the one who's in a mess."

"Only temporarily, you fool!" raved the creature, jumping franti-

cally up and down. "Look!" he screamed, pointing a tiny hand toward the window over Granger's left shoulder.

The geologist gasped as he shot a quick glance in the direction of the thing's outstretched arm. A pale green light had turned the surrounding land and sky into an eerie dawn that extended its weird phosphorescence into the cabin itself. And two hundred yards from the cabin, in a small area relatively clear of major obstructions, was the same ship he had seen a few hours before.

"They're here!" shouted the alien. "Let me out!"

Granger slammed shut the door and lifted a massive oak bar into iron brackets on either side. Then he was at the window again. A hatch near the bottom of the craft was open, but there was no sign of movement.

THEN he saw one of them, an exact duplicate of his captive, running from bush to bush about fifty feet from the ship. A few steps behind him was another. Two more nearby scrambled over an immense boulder and scurried into the brush. Another five were emerging, like a patrol of midgets, from a ravine to the north of the cabin.

"Be sensible, you idiot!" snarled the thing in the crate. "I'm giving

you this final chance. Unlock this contrivance, and all will be well with you. I'll speak on your behalf."

"So you can lead your buddies right back here? Sure," said Granger, "that's all I'd have to do to finish myself off in a real hurry."

"Do as I say!" yelled the alien. "For your own sake!"

"Look," panted Granger, "I know I was crazy to fool with you in the first place, but now that you're here and they're outside, you're staying, see?"

He reached under the lumpy pile of cotton that served as a mattress and pulled out his .30-30 rifle. Little Boy Blue and his pop gun, he thought. He grabbed a handful of cartridges from a box under the bed and began jamming them into the magazine.

"That will be of no use, my friend," droned a hollow voice behind him.

Granger spun himself around just as a pane of glass in the window flew to pieces under the impact of a short, shiny gun barrel. A perfect reproduction of the face of the creature in the cage centered itself in the jagged frame of the broken window and gave him the shadow of a smile that was closer to a victorious leer.

"Put down your weapon," the newcomer ordered coldly.

Get that rifle up fast, Granger commanded himself.

"I repeat," said the face at the window. "Lower your weapon."

They'll let you have it anyway, Granger thought grimly. He slowly curled his finger around the trigger and started to move when he was jarred off his feet by a roaring blast that ripped the door from its hinges and sent it crashing against the rear wall of the cabin.

Outside the ruined entrance stood a group of aliens all armed. Fearfully, he looked to the window, but their leader was gone. In a second he appeared at the door, moved inside the cabin, and Granger automatically stepped back, his hazy mind calculating roughly the few feet of escape route remaining to him. In a moment he was there, his back flattened against the cabin wall.

The short creature kept coming on, its murky orbs fixed on Granger's white, drawn countenance. Then it stopped its advance.

"So you have one of our people," it said in a voice that twanged like piano wire.

Granger tried once in vain for his voice, then gave up. He stared over the head of his foe at the silent assembly outside the cabin, then at the thing in the packing crate. It was sitting there, quiet, immobile, but intently watching the

scene between the earthman and his visitor.

"You are holding one of us captive," the commander remarked. "This is a most unfortunate situation, indeed." The small figure stepped aside quickly and waved an arm.

Granger, perspiration trickling down his face, watched a score of glistening weapons raised and pointed inside the cabin. For a second he looked directly at the menacing horde. Then his eyes saw nothing. A blazing flash of white light burst forth from the doorway, and it was all over.

Granger forced open his aching eyes and squinted in the direction of the fiery blast, but the doorway was empty. The commander was still there, though, walking slowly to the door.

Why am I alive? Granger asked himself incredulously. Or am I dead? He bumped his fist against his forehead once or twice and gave

his head a vigorous shake. Suddenly, he turned his gaze to the cage. But he saw nothing that resembled the rebuilt packing crate; only a mound of ashes and twisted spikes. In the center of the heap, like a fat, dwarfish king astride his fallen kingdom, was the charred, blackened shell of the grotesque creature that had once occupied the wooden cell.

Then he moved cautiously toward the door and stared, speechless, at the leader of the expedition.

"We shall depart now," said the being. "Thank you for helping us."

* * *

Not much later, across the silent reaches of space, a communications operator on another planet looked up from his receiving equipment and handed his superior a message just transmitted from a ship leaving the planet Earth: RETURN MISSION SUCCESSFUL. DESERTER LOCATED AND EXECUTED.

THE END

You'll Be Pleased To Know - -

that your editors are sparing no effort in securing for you the very finest science fiction reading. Take for example the forthcoming March feature attraction, **HIGHWAYS IN HIDING** by George O. Smith. We sincerely believe that this story is one of the great science fiction novels of the decade. Its 80,000 words will appear in hard cover book form in the near future, but we're presenting it to you first as a four-part serial. So we join you in anticipation of a great science fiction experience. Just one more indication of our expanding editorial program.



Conducted by Mari Wolf

ONE question you always hear from newcomers to the ranks of science fiction readers is, "Just what is a science fiction fan, anyway?" It's really a hard question to answer. There are probably as many answers as there are fans, for fans, despite certain common interests and a tendency to gather together in conventions, are really a pretty individualistic bunch. Fandom is easy enough to describe in general terms, but it's not so easy to pick out the distinguishing features that set fans off from casual readers and other non-belongers to the ranks.

Of course, first you run up against the problems of definitions. Some people consider themselves fans because they regularly read one or more science fiction magazines. Other people consider themselves non-fans because they've

never edited or written for fanzines. But beyond the mere definition of the term *fan* there's the interesting question of what else this person is, what other attributes, in addition to interest in science fiction and/or general fan activities, make up the whole personality.

There have been various polls of fandom, samplings of fan opinions and interests. As far as I know, Bob Tucker (who certainly needs no introduction here) was the first to conduct an inclusive fan survey. His first questionnaire was sent out some six years ago; it's still being quoted. Now, many polls and many definitions later, Tucker's back—with the second survey.

I don't know about the first one; I never saw the complete list of questions. The current survey, though, is excellent. It's not so

much what Tucker asks, in many cases, as it is the implications that you, answering the thing, read into it . . .

From this questionnaire it should be possible for Tucker to determine how much fans, and fandom, have changed since his first survey. It is an inclusive survey; it contains almost as many questions on the fan's personal or non-stf life, his habits, his education, beliefs, general interests, as it does on his fan activities. The person who answers the questionnaire seriously should give, by answering it, a well-rounded picture of himself as an individual.

The questionnaire is anonymous. This, in itself, overcomes one of the chief drawbacks of most such surveys. Too many fan polls ask that you give all sorts of personal information about yourself, and then that you identify yourself. They promise secrecy, of course, but there's always a certain doubt. And even though you may have absolutely nothing to hide in your fannish or non-fannish life, there are probably things about yourself that you wouldn't want every casual acquaintance to know.

The questionnaire is simple. No essay type answers are required. Many of the questions can be answered "yes" or "no". Others, such as those asking the name of your favorite author, artist, or magazine, can be answered in a word or two. Only a few require more.

The questionnaire should be easy to evaluate, judging from reading it. This point of evaluation came up when we were discussing it at

San Francisco. . . Pete Vorziner brought up the point that, in a poll of this type, you have to be careful to separate the answers out by age groups. (Otherwise, what sort of loaded answers would you get to questions on the extent of the fans education? Your under sixteen fans won't have completed high school, much less college.) In this questionnaire, though, the first question is, "What is your age?" It will be easy to evaluate on a chronological basis.

The survey shows the result of a lot of work, and a lot of careful arrangement of the questions. The basic work is Tucker's; but the compiling and distribution was all done by Gerald A. Steward. The collaboration has proved an excellent one, and one that probably will be discussed for the next six years. (If any of you have copies of the survey to be mailed back, send them to Gerald Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ontario, Canada.)

There are nine major headings in the questionnaire. The first five are chiefly non-science-fictional. Heading One is entitled *you*; it asks you your age, sex, occupation, hobbies. Heading Two, *habits and possessions*, gets a little more personal. Do you drink? Smoke? (Cigar? Cigarette? Pipe?) Chew? (Tobacco? Gum?) . . . And so on, through more and less personal queries, down to: Do you own a TV set?

Heading Three covers your marital status. It starts out simply enough: Are you married? But it includes, down in the middle category, one pertinent-to-fandom

question: Would you prefer to marry a fan?

The questions under heading Four, *education*, seem quite standard. They're the kind you run across on most polls and employment applications. The number Five heading, covering religion, is much more comprehensive.

With heading, Six, *publications, professional*, you get into the questions actively related to fans and fandom. You are asked, among other things: What is your favorite pro-magazine? Which do you dislike the most, How many do you buy in a month? How many of the promags do you buy?

(This last should really discover what fans think the promags are.)

Heading Seven is *publications, amateur*. The questions, as far as they go, are similar to the ones in heading six, with "fanzine" substituted for "promag."

Heading Eight is the longest of all, with nineteen questions. It covers fan activities. In fact, it covers them more completely and succinctly than does any questionnaire or description of fandom that I've seen. It's possible that you could consider yourself a fan without participating in any of the activities listed here; however, most fan purists would insist that you'd have to be active in at least a few of them to be considered more than just a casual reader.

Do you correspond? Write material for fanzines? Do artwork for fanzines? Have you had any material published in a fanzine? (This last one seems at first glance redundant. But is it? Fanzines

send out rejection slips too . . .)

For those who publish, or have published, fanzines, there are quite a few more questions. The survey wants to know what kind of duplicating process you use, how many different zine titles you have published, whether or not you expect to make a profit. (Profit?) There's space for a listing of your fanzines; Tucker and Steward are trying to determine the total number of zines ever published.

There are also questions about fanclubs. Do you belong to a fanclub? To how many clubs? What kind? There are questions on non-local clubs and on local clubs. They ask if you've ever held an office, if you think you could improve your club, if you think your club is worthwhile.

The last heading is entitled simply: *miscellaneous*. Here the survey deviates from information gathering and asks your opinions. I don't know a better way for Steward and Tucker to have ascertained just what fans think of themselves, of fans and fandom and science fiction, than by asking such simple things as these:

How many people are there in active fandom? Does fandom have a purpose? If so, what? Do you allow fans to visit your home? Do you think man will conquer space? About when?

And the two questions so often bruited back and forth wherever fans gather together.

Do you think fans are more intelligent than the average person? Do you think fans suffer from an inferiority complex?

They're easy to answer. You

have an opinion; everyone does. And the answers are anonymous

...

Of course, there's more to the questionnaire than the examples I've quoted. It's an extremely well-thought out job, and one that, when evaluated, should give a very good cross-sectional view of that elusive creature, the modern fan.

Tucker and Steward, between them, have really accomplished something.

* * *

I have a letter from Ed McNulty, secretary-treasurer of ISFA, the Indiana Science Fiction Association. He includes some information on the club that I'd like to pass on to you.

"The ISFA has grown (since 1953) from four members to sixteen. Dues are \$3.00 a year in Indianapolis and \$1.50 a year outside the city. We put out a fanzine and a newszine, both of which are free to members. ISFA, our fanzine is put out bi-monthly and contains from twenty-four to thirty pages. This is a good place to mention that we could use material, articles, artwork, stories, etc. More restricted to the club is our bi-weekly newszine, ISFANEWS. It's six pages contains articles, short-short stories, some artwork and, buried somewhere, club news.

"Our meetings are held bi-weekly on Saturday nights at the homes of club members. The meetings are quite formal; rare is the individual who can make himself heard above the din of one of our meetings. Usually there are three or four discussions going on at once. Topics range from anthro-

pology to zoology; from Aristotle to McCarthy.

"Our members not only talk about stf; they are also quite active in fandom. Ten of us edit, illustrate, publish, or write amateur stf. Besides our own editors the editors of EISFA, *Femzine*, and *Merlin* are ISFA members."

Ed McNulty hopes that any mid-western fan reading this will be interested in joining. Sounds like a really good organization, and one you could have a lot of fun in if you belonged. If you're in the area, you can get in touch with Ed McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Also, you can get copies of ISFA from Ed. (15c.) You can get the ISFA *News* (priced from 3c per single copy to 26/50c) from Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis. If you're in the area, look them up . . .

* * *

Now to the fanzines:

PSYCHOTIC: 10c Dick Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon. Luckily, this issue too I have something to berate Geis about. This may sound silly but it gives me great pleasure to pan Geis about something. I'll admit the things are rather small but, after all, no one is perfect and Dick must slip somewhere. I'll admit I haven't seen the slip yet so I pounce on things like fuzzy periods, faint commas and the like. (Actually, the dittoing's really great.) I think I do have a clue to Geis' falling though. He didn't show up at San Francisco so he must have two heads and be ashamed of it. This figures be-

cause it must take two heads to turn out *Psychotic*. (Not to mention five hands.)

This issue has an interesting combination: Harlan Ellison writing on 7th fandom and Jim Harmon giving the true story on why he broke down Harlan's door at at Convention. Wow!

You can also read about the latest fan fad, paint-it-yourself, and other odd things in a column by Bill Reynolds. And last (but meaning last, in the same way as the last line of a limerick) a Bob Tucker exclusive, "Inside Bellyfontaine." Tucker alone is worth a dime.

Rating: 1

* * *

VARIOSO: 10c; John Magnus Jr., 9312 Second Ave., Silver Springs, Md. One thing about this zine, you just can't type it. It really lives up to the implications of its name, switching mood from issue to issue. But staying right up there, all the time.

This issue, subtitled "The Serious Constructive Gazette", gives still another gay report of the Midwestcon at Bellefontaine. From there it roves to Shelby Vick's "Dear John" (either a successor to his "Dear Alice" or a tribute to the long ago soap opera of the same name) in which Shel perpetuates the wildest pun west of Belfast. Then there's an open letter from Dean Grennell, of *Grue*, which can be slightly incomprehensible to outsiders, and assorted art by Ray Nelson and Dave English. Also, music. Theme III in A flat by John Magnus. Wow!

This issue isn't quite up to the

last (which was a classic type seldom found outside of annuals and swan-songs.) Thoroughly recommended.

Rating: 2

* * *

OOPSLA: 15c; bimonthly; Gregg Calkins, 2817 11th St., Santa Monica, Calif. It's hard to come up with anything different to say about *Oopsla*. It's consistently a fine zine, well worth the price, with good mimeography, format, and balance of subject matter. It has among its regular and irregular contributors many of the top writers in fandom, turning out some of their top work. If you haven't read it, you should do so; if you have, you don't need selling.

In this issue Bob Bloch, in his "Unsolicited Testimonial," turns serious. His theme: Wilson Tucker, the writer (a separate entity from alter ego Bob Tucker.) Something that should have been said a long time ago.

Dean Grennell, of *Grue*, joins the *Oopsla* stable with his "Grenadian Etchings"—a discussion, this time, of pennames and the writer's reasons for choosing them. Vernon McCain writes on the science fiction slump, and Walt Willis gives a couple of short accounts, one of the British pre-Convention times and the other of an episode of his cross-USA journey.

All this, and Terry Carr's "Face Critturs" too.

Rating: 2

* * *

A BAS: no price listed; Boyd Raeburn, 14 Lynd Ave., Toronto 3, Canada. In this issue we learn more of Boyd Raeburn the person

as opposed to Raeburn the fan. He admits to owning a sports car. With a blower! (A blower is a supercharger to you neo-sports car fans.) He doesn't say what kind of car, but just the fact that he admits owning one is enough to prove that he is not a true fan. Can you imagine a real fan spending two or three thousand dollars for a car! Think of the garages full of magazines you could support on that kind of money.

A *Bas* isn't very formal in format. In fact, I think the closest you could get to an English translation of "A Bas" would be "cool." If I'm right this fits very well. They do a lot of satire and almost always a review of the latest in cool music. This is sort of a Canadian *Psychotic*.

Rating: 2

* * *

PEON: 10c; Charles Lee Riddle, 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Conn. A high spot in the issue I have here is Jim Harmon's "I Remember *Peon*," a review of the six years of this fanzine's history.

Jim Harmon, who has done a lot of writing for *Peon* over the intervening years, and who has lately been selling professionally, was a neofan when he received the Number 1 issue of this zine. So his career as a fan closely parallels *Peon's* as a zine.

Carol McKinney's "Justifiable Decision," all about margins, even or ragged shows by example various schools of justifying. The hyphen at the beginning of the line style really throws you. But how about the style common in Latin America, with the hyphen

being put under, instead of after, the last letter in the line?)

Rating: 3

* * *

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN: 10c; bimonthly; Stuart Hoffman, Box 13, Black Earth, Wisconsin. This zine is the official organ of the NFFF, or National Fantasy Fan Federation, and is free to all members of the organization. It is of special interest to NFFF members as it contains a lot of club news and reports of club activities. It would probably be of real interest to you if you are considering joining a national fan organization like the N3F; you can get an idea what the group has to offer its members.

In this issue British editor H. J. Campbell reports on the state of professional British science fiction. Joe Gibson writes on astronomical navigation—how to find your way home across the galaxy to "the Ridge" constellation, and Sol.

And Dick Geis, in his "Slantasy," writes the best of all the fan fanzine reviews.

Rating: 4

* * *

FEMIZINE: Francis Evans, School House, Teignmouth St., Collyhurst, Manchester 9, England. The price of this one is 9d in England; no American rates are given. You could probably trade fanzines of magazines for it though . . .

Joan W. Carr is the editor of this British all-girl fanzine, not to be confused with the American produced *Femzine*. Probably for the average male fan it would be of no interest; however if you're a girl fan interested in the activities

of overseas girl fan you might try it: It is definitely slanted to the woman reader, and especially to the girls who like femme-fan clubs, etc.

Rating: 6

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER: 10c or 3/25c; monthly; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 34th Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. This is the tradezine of the field, where you can list an stf or fantasy items you have to sell, or where you can probably find listed items that you want to purchase. It's not a general fanzine; it is very specialized and of interest to you only if you're a collector, or if you happen to be buying, selling, or trading science fiction or fantasy material. If you're in the market you'll find the *Trader* most useful; if you're not, it's not for you.

Rating: 3

* * *

VULCAN: 15c; quarterly; Terry Carr, 184 Cambridge St., San Francisco, 12, Calif. According to Carr's editorial, *Vulcan* is leaving the ranks of general interest fanzines and will "lean more toward the offtrail and humorous side of things." With the current crop of contributors this shouldn't be difficult. Here, in this issue, are pages and pages of Carr's "Face Critturs"—viewing "It Came From Outer Space." There's also a very funny story by Mike Rossman, "Surprise." Well written, with a fine characterization of a "galf." (An inhabitant of the third planet of Alpha Centauri, and the real walking encyclopedia.)

There's also Bob Bloch.

And David English's cartooning. Plus interlineations in French yet. But why red ink on gray paper?

Rating: 3

* * *

ALPHA: bimonthly; Dave Vendelmans, 180 Strydhof Ave., Berchem, Belgium. Subscription rates, American, are 60c a year in mint stamps, which works out to a dime an issue. Worth it, too. *Alpha*, which advertises itself as "Belgium's and possibly Continental Europe's only fanzine," gives you a most interesting picture of fanning aboard.

The issue I have consists mainly of Convention reports—of the "Twerpeon (Antwerp to you). Most of the familiar British names are sprinkled through the pages; apparently half of British fandom came by for the affair.

Mimeo is good; Jean Steer's cover is really funny, and the contents are in English that would put a large percentage of American fan writers to shame.

Rating: 4

* * *

TELLUS: 15c; quarterly; 1614 Collingwood Ave., San Jose 25, Calif. This definitely bears the stamp of its editor's personality—but not, so far as I have been able to discover, the editor's name. Ye ed is fourteen, planned on attending the Convention, and feels superior to neo-fans. That's all I know.

The zine is steeply priced at 15c. has a good photo-offset cover, but the interior, though legible enough, is rather crowded and cluttered. Most of the fiction and articles are written with a very

young slant, much the best being George Wetzel's "A Forgotten Story of A. Merritt's."

Rating: 7

* * *

MIMI: 15c quarterly, Georgina Ellis, 1428 15th St. East, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Norman Browne has an article in this issue, "On Editing a Fanzine," which could well be taken to heart by a good many brand new fan editors. He mentions the newcomers to fandom who discover amateur publishing and plunge in, hectoring or mimeoing ink flying, without the faintest idea, really, of either the mechanics or the creative end of the job. Most such fans print only their own work or that of other young and inexperienced fans. The results may be okay, but the percentages are against it . . .

There's Bill Stavdal's story of a boy whose acquaintances all disappear, and a long, most enjoyable letter section.

Rating: 6

* * *

SATELLITE: Don Allen, 3 Arkle St., Gateshead 8, Co. Dunham, England. Editor Allen will send copies of *Satellite* to American fans in exchange for "fanzines, prozines, or contributions."

This issue I have here contains two articles on the writing of science fiction. One is Brian Berry's discussion of emotion in stf, "To the Head or to the Heart." The other is Jon J. Deegan's attack on the often unrelieved grimness of the modern story, "Science Fiction Ought To Be Fun . . ."

There's also Ted Mason's story about the first rocket to Venus,

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"In Peace and Friendship." And
L. Blackie's article on "Electro-
magnetism."

Mimeoing here is legible, but
somewhat rough. Their typewriter
isn't too hot on stencils . . . Format
and reproduction both could stand
smoothing.

Rating: 5

* * *

Remember, send your fanzines to
me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box,
IMAGINATION, Box 230, Evan-
ston, Ill. See you next month . . .

—Mari Wolf



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

LUCKY STARR AND THE OCEANS OF VENUS

by Paul French, 186 pages, \$2.50 Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York.

This is a juvenile. I say that not unkindly but to establish a frame of reference for criticizing it properly. It is a part of the series which includes "David Starr: Space Ranger", "Lucky Starr and the Pirates of the Asteroids."

Lucky Starr, youngest member of the Council of Science meets many strange adventures and monsters while defending the bubble cities of Venus. As they say, "there is plenty of furious action."

There is a place for this sort of thing; it is far superior to the comic strip science fiction pattern. It is entertaining in its way and it

won't upset anyone. It is not, of course, intended for the fan; it is frankly a juvenile and no more.

I am a little astonished however that writers for the juvenile market fail to unabashedly imitate the fine material produced by Heinlein and Clarke. *Their* material is singularly far above the average and certainly can't be classed as simple juvenalia — again this is said without rancor.

Paul French shows inventiveness and a richness of imagination. I'm sure he could produce a superior piece of work if he would pay more attention to detail—in s-f, especially for juveniles, detail is everything. Try this adventure story only on a beginner though!

L etters

from the R eaders

KEEP "OPEN FORUM"

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have just finished reading the November issue of *Madge* and both your answer to my letter and Sam Johnson's. I do have a few points I wish to add in conjunction with the general discussion.

First, you contend that if the UN sponsors a space satellite it will mean Russia has the secret. Now, may I ask, what secret? You speak of a secret as if we were hiding from the world a great new invention, as if the satellite were already built awaiting only some new scientific principle to power it to its orbit.

But there is no secret. Perhaps some phases of operating a space satellite would be classified due to military significance but that is all. I dare say there are many men—both in Free and Communist controlled nations—who could design a practical, functional space station. Presentday scientific concepts are adequate enough upon which to base the engineering prin-

ciples.

You may well ask then, if the technology is advanced to so great a degree why isn't there a space station? Unfortunately the limitations placed on the scientists and industrialists are not technological, but economic. The cost would be tremendous. Therein lies the crux of the matter. Since the cost is so high the project could only be sponsored by the government. And there's plenty of red tape involved in putting through government projects!

With these thoughts in mind let us consider the UN. Now if the individual nations are wont to initiate such a project due to economic problems and red tape, just think of the obstructions to be encountered in the official channels of the UN. Regardless of the supposed ideals of the UN and the boon a space station would prove for all, I doubt seriously if the matter would ever reach the General Assembly for a vote.

Following this line of logic I arrive at the conclusion that there

is no need for worry or even discussion concerning possible UN control of a space station at the present time. Yet, there is a danger!

Because my logic eliminates the UN as a sponsor, it does not mean it eliminates the possibility of the communist regime from sponsoring a similar project. Thus, the whole question of a space satellite now resolves itself to be: Should the USA wait any longer before beginning actual work on a satellite? The obvious answer is an emphatic no! Yet, we are waiting. . .

I only hope you continue to keep an open forum on this subject. After-all, someone should keep it in the public eye . . . for it may be that such a space station, in the right hands, may someday be the salvation of the world

William T. Walsh
c/o Accelerator Development
Div. (T-128)
Brookhaven National
Laboratory
Upton, L. I., N. Y.

The danger you hint at is closer than you think, Bill. In our July 1954 editorial we reported on a United Press dispatch which revealed that Russia was forming committees to explore the astrophysical sciences. Particular emphasis was placed on interplanetary travel. Since a space station would be the big jump toward interplanetary travel it is almost a certainty that Russia is working on the project. And you're right—we sit idly by doing nothing! Rest assured we'll continue to keep the subject before the public eye . . . wh

SEMANTIC LABYRINTH . . .

Dear Bill:

If you have no objection I would like to add my two cents worth of opinion into this discussion which once started out to be on control of a space station.

From letters in the November issue it seems to me that both you and Sam Johnson are not exactly sure which side of the fence you are on. I think that both of you make excellent points in some instances and then turn around and try to qualify them, but all you succeed in doing is confuse the issue.

As I see it, Sam Johnson's argument is that in a society such as ours during the present time it is necessary for all people who have at least thought one original thought sometime during their life to temper their godgiven right of free speech with some practicality.

As for you, Bill, you're being the idealistic one in thinking that as long as you express what you think to be honest American thoughts there is no danger in it

Now for my opinion. I think both of you are right and wrong at the same time. It is quite necessary for all of us to be able to speak our minds freely at all times, yet it is equally as necessary for us to protect ourselves from those who seek only to turn honest and innocuous thoughts into seemingly unpatriotic and treacherous ideas. In other words this is a personal problem which has to be solved by each individual after careful consideration and not something for which an overall rule may be

formulated.

As for the space station itself, what would happen to it if a missile full of large pieces of steel shot was sent up into an orbit which corresponded with that of the space station, but the missile revolved about the earth in the opposite direction from that of the station? The missile would then be exploded, expelling tons of steel shot; upon contact with the station there would be so many holes the satellite would be a sieve!

H. Daniel Cohen
2105 University Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, N. Y.

In the expression of ideas part of the function of free speech is in allowing a person to answer any accusation of treachery, etc., and prove otherwise. To hold an honest and sincere view but not to express it is to renounce free speech. Insofar as the discussions in Madge are concerned, and in particular Sam Johnson's opinions, we may disagree with them but we'll defend his right to speak his mind, here or anywhere else. Incidentally, your point about twisting phrases out of intended context is illustrated in the following letters of protest with

YANKEE BULL

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I read IMAGINATION every month and enjoy it thoroughly, especially your letter section, although this is the first time I have entered into its discussions. I probably wouldn't be doing it now except I'm so mad I could chew nails

and spit rust. The reason?

Your answer to Bob Munn's letter in the November issue from which I will quote: "What would the rest of the world have done without the USA a few short years ago? Started wearing Swastikas?"

I have one question to ask. Where was this great champion of the underdog, the USA, in 1939? If you can answer that satisfactorily you are better than any Yank that I have yet met.

Let's not use Madge's letter section for spreading Yankee Bull!

Lloyd J. Trevart
109 S. Archibald St.
Fort William, Ont., Canada

OUR HEAVENLY NATION!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Why do you Americans deify yourselves to such a sickening degree? Anyone would think that Americans invented rockets, or radar, or nuclear fission, not to mention democracy, freedom, or any of the other things you keep harping on about as being typically "American" or traditionally so.

Why do you, Japanese-like, take European ideas and inventions and label them American? What right have you to assume that America is a responsible enough nation to man an Orbital Space Station for the good of the world as a whole?

You talk about freedom and democracy as if they were some peculiarly American virtues, and yet your own reply to Sam Johnson's letter in the November issue is proof that as far as you are concerned the United States is becom-

ing a thought - repressed state—which is the first step toward thought control and totalitarianism.

As far as I can see in this matter, whenever a country begins to worry about the way people think there must be something wrong with that country's social system. Actually, the answer where you are concerned lies in the self-deification in which you, as a nation indulge. It has got so that whenever you wish to imbue anything with any particular virtue or greatness you apply the adjective, "American."

In doing this not only do you insult other nations no less devoted to democracy or inventiveness, but you also introduce the concept that if a thing is not "American" it is unworthy or inferior. It is only a step further that anything which is not "American" is communist.

There is a difference between trying for co-existence with Russia (and being prepared for the worst) and simply shouting that war is inevitable. With the former there is a chance for peace, the latter, absolutely none.

That's why I think that an Orbital Space Station would be as dangerous in exclusively American hands as it would be in Russian hands. At least, more idealistic nations like Canada, and Britain should participate, and anyway, don't be too sure that either one of them, or Australia won't beat the USA or Russia into space!

Hugh MacKinnan
Room 825
1441 Drummond St.
Montreal, Que., Canada

IN FREEDOM'S CAUSE

Dear Mr Hamling:

Although I seldom get involved in an stf argument, I feel that in all justice I must take exception to one of your remarks in the letter section of *Madge's* November issue.

On page 125 you say: "What would the rest of the world have done without the USA a few short years ago?"

Surely you can't mean this statement literally. True, the entry of the USA upon World War II bolstered the European countries so as to bring victory out of defeat. However, without the aid of Britain, etc., we might also have perished as a war on two sides drew our strength. The USA is not impervious to defeat as our statesmen realize.

Another point gainst this "I am superior to you" type of statement can be found in one of your remarks on page 122 wherein you state your pride in our American ideals. Don't you believe that this statement by Winston Churchill is an American ideal: "There is no other case of a nation arriving at the summit of world power, seeking no territorial gain, but earnestly resolved to use her strength and wealth in the cause of (worldwide) freedom and progress." If not, I doubt you are out of the fog yet yourself!

Daniel G. Rose
P.O. Box 734
Seward, Alaska

Before making our comment to the above letters we're presenting one which in part renders an assist . . . with

TRUST—IN TIME

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Re the space station debate. First off let me say that when one is established I certainly hope we will be the ones to do so.

However, human nature being what it is, don't you think that our allies would first resent then pull away from us? I am afraid that to be a leader does not always command trust and respect. Regard the reactions of different peoples in various other countries aided by us. Obviously there would be those who would stir up fear and distrust of any nation commanding such power; just as obviously, as time passed, more and more people would believe in the few. They say all problems can be solved given time. Control of a space station

is a problem which will take time, for it will be a tough nut to crack.

Now is a good time to say thanks to both you and *Madge* for many hours of enjoyable reading. And, the same goes for your companion magazine, *Imaginative Tales*.

James H. Lyles

1 East End Ave.

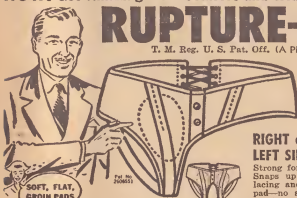
New York 21, N.Y.

Concerning Lloyd Trevart's "Yankee Bull" our question about what would the rest of the world have done without the USA did not impugn the role or efforts of our allies. As for where we were in 1939 you will recall that the outbreak of World War II was a European affair and there was hope at the time that Britain and France et al would be able to cope with the situation. At the same time don't forget the small matter of loans and

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supplies—such as 50 destroyers which went to bolster the Royal Navy. There was an economic life-line running from our shores long before we took military action. In answer to Dan Rose in this regard, we do mean it literally. Ask yourself the question. If we had sat idle the free world would have fallen. Matter of fact you answer it when you say we brought victory out of defeat! But again, we did not in any way belittle our allies' plight or efforts. To Hugh MacKinnan we admit we are puzzled; we were not aware that we Americans were insisting all technological advances were our property. Your whole approach to the subject seems rather hysterical and childish. In regard to Sam Johnson's views, Hugh, we fail to see where the correspondence indicates thought repression. Or perhaps you're stating what you prefer to believe, rather than what is true. Your observation concerning inadvisability of USA control of a space station due to our "war-like" attitude is fortunately belied in the statement of your parent country's prime minister, as quoted in Dan Rose's letter. If there is one country in this world which will use power for no personal gain, that country is the USA. It's not a question of being superior—unless you mean economically, industrially, and militarily. Our ideals are profound, yet humble, and we use our power to further them for the good of all. This thought is of course referred to by Jim Lyles. It's too true, Jim that benevolence often breeds jealousy and discontent. But time, in addition to being a great healer, is also an educator.

The puzzling thing is that it seems to take some of our friends too long a time to wake up!—and learn wh

ALIEN LIFE FORMS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

As a Madge reader from the very beginning, it has been my custom to start each issue by reading the short stories first, then concentrate on the novel. Not so the November issue featuring DON'T PANIC! by Geoff St. Reynard. This novel was too big a temptation to put off. So I read it before all else, read avidly, for the "flying saucer shocker" was just that—a shocker! Grim, tough, completely absorbing.

With the story finished I got to thinking about possible forms of alien life, an ever-fascinating pastime for the science fiction fan.

Environmental conditions on the numberless possible worlds outside our solar system could produce life-forms both many and varied. Some aliens might be quite simple to understand. Others, possessing limbs, organs, and even senses different from ours would be complex beyond human understanding.

A form of energy vapor is one example. Alfred Gordon Bennett, in his book "Focus on the Unknown" gives further examples. Inorganic life-forms, he writes, may include life in stone, steel, rocks, earth and fire. Intelligent particles of dust cannot be ruled out. Nor can intelligent quartz, flames and clouds.

Ones senses reel under the possibilities!

Alex Saunders
34 Hillside Ave., N.

Toronto 12, Ont., Canada

The key to alien life and our understanding them, is, we think, the word—intelligent. There are many forms of life on this planet, to which the term "intelligent" does not strictly apply. If an alien life-form traverses space and reaches us it will obviously possess "intelligence" though its physical and/or organic properties may be drastically different. Part of the "intelligent" characteristic will be a means of communication, which, if learned, will make the life-form understandable. Someday men will face, explore, and resolve such a question wh

GAL WITH A PROBLEM!

Dear wh:

I simply wrote to tell you that I think IMAGINATION is the mostest! And I don't seem to be the only one around here who thinks so. I have missed half your issues because I was too slow to get to a newsstand the day *Madge* hit the market.

Several times I ended up getting the last copy anybody had. One time I dragged myself to every bookstore and newsstand in town and no *Madge* left. You may not realize it, but *Madge* sells faster here than *Astounding* does!

Joan Doyle
1217 Hillcrest Ave.
Monessen, Pa.

Joan, we're surprised you didn't think of the obvious solution to your problem—subscribe! wh

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—AND HERE'S TWELVE BIG REASONS WHY!

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—St. Luke 21:25, 26.

When the Bible was written *prophecy* was an outstanding feature of this greatest of all books. Today many scoff at predictions, yet—the Biblical prophecy written 2,000 years ago that the Jews would reestablish a new nation of Israel, *has just come true!* Today we know that there are "cycles" when wars and world problems reach fanatical heights—then changes come.

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